Course Syllabus

EMB 2831HF – Difficult Stories of Jesus: The Empty Tomb
Emmanuel College
Toronto School of Theology
Summer 2018

Instructor Information

Instructor: Christopher B. Zeichmann, PhD
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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Identification

Course Number: EMB 2831HF
Course Format: In-class
Course Name: Difficult Stories of Jesus: The Empty Tomb
Course Location: Room Number, Building
Class Times: Saturdays
Prerequisites: None

Course Description

It is often said that the lessons of seminary bible classes rarely reach the pews; when difficult topics arise – e.g., what basis does the Christmas or Easter story have in history? – ministers often deflect the questions or appeal to a vague notion of mystery. This course aims to prepare ministers to have these difficult conversations through recent scholarship on the empty tomb. In the past several centuries, traditional Christian claims about the bodily resurrection of Jesus have been subject to great scrutiny. This has led to a number of competing proposals: the resurrection was “spiritual” and not corporeal, that the body of Jesus was stolen, that traditional claims are still viable, among many others. Likewise, how does one consider the virgin birth or narratives where Jesus disrupts the laws of nature? How might one navigate these claims for one’s own theological position or articulate these complex – but crucial – issues to one’s congregation?

This class will not promote any particular explanation of the empty tomb, but will provide students with the tools to articulate their own understanding of what happened at the empty tomb and argue concisely why they believe that to be the case. It will also prepare them to discuss difficult issues about historicity with their congregation or other laity. Consequently, during course discussions we will extend our analyses to similarly difficult texts (e.g., virgin birth, miracles).
Methods of evaluation include prepared notes, participation, a reflection paper, and a summative paper. Methods of instruction include lectures, readings, and small group discussion.

**Course Schedule**

**Session One: The Canonical Gospels and Independent Attestation**

Required: Mark 16; Matt 28; Luke 24; John 20-21; Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 616-661


**Session Two: The Apostle Paul and the Date of Testimonies**

Required: 1 Cor 15; 1 Thes 4-5; Brown, *Virginal Conception*, 69-95


Small Groups: The Teachings of Jesus

**Session Three: Texts without an Obvious Resurrection**

Choose *either Q or* Thomas readings

**Q**


**Thomas**

- Required: Gospel of Thomas; Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered*, 100-156

Small Groups: The Virginal Conception of Jesus

**Session Four: Post-Mortem Vindication: Apotheosis, Translation, and Assumption**

No Required Reading
Choice [choose two]: Miller, “Mark’s Empty Tomb”; Cotter, “Graeco-Roman Apotheosis”; Lapide, *Resurrection of Jesus*, 44-65

Small Groups: Jesus’ Water Miracles

**Session Five: Jesus’ Resurrection outside the New Testament**

No Required Reading

Choose one of the Following Sets:

- Testimonium Flavianum; Meier, “Jesus in Josephus”; Kirby, “Josephus and Jesus”
- Gospel of Peter; Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 125-136 and 165-182; Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1317-1349

Small Groups: Jesus’ Childhood

**Session Six: Theologic Conclusions**


No Choice Readings

Two weeks after Session Six: Final Paper Due

**Course Resources**

Required Course Texts

- Academic Study Bible: EITHER *HarperCollins Study Bible* OR *New Oxford Annotated Bible*
- Students are encouraged to bring a synopsis of the Gospels as well; most introductory courses at TST require Throckmorton’s synopsis, which would be useful here.
- All other readings will be available via Blackboard or in class

Bibliography (most readings are not required)

- Kirby, Peter. "Josephus and Jesus: The Testimonium Flavianum Question" online at [http://earlychristianwritings.com/testimonium.html](http://earlychristianwritings.com/testimonium.html)

**Course Website(s)**
- Blackboard [https://weblogin.utoronto.ca/](https://weblogin.utoronto.ca/)

This course uses Blackboard for its course website. To access it, go to the UofT portal login page at [http://portal.utoronto.ca](http://portal.utoronto.ca) and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in to the portal using your UTORid and password, look for the My Courses module, where you’ll find the link to the website for all your Blackboard-based courses. (Your course registration with ROSI gives you access to the course website at Blackboard.) Note also the information at [http://www.portalinfo.utoronto.ca/content/information-students](http://www.portalinfo.utoronto.ca/content/information-students). Students who have trouble accessing Blackboard should ask [xxx] for further help.

**Course Learning Objectives/Outcomes**

Students successfully completing this course will be able to demonstrate the following learning outcomes.

(A) IN RESPECT OF GENERAL ACADEMIC SKILLS:
- Identify the source of disagreement in conflicting academic arguments and the relative strengths of those arguments.

(B) IN RESPECT OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTENT OF ONE OR MORE THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINES:
- Articulate a clear position on what happened at the empty tomb that accounts for the ancient data as well as its social context.
- Be conversant in the variety of positions scholars take on the matter, being able to identify strengths and weaknesses in their argument.
- Use the critical tools developed over the course to articulate with precision their opinion on other controversial issues concerning the life of Jesus (e.g., the virgin birth).

(C) IN RESPECT OF PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION
- Articulate a clear understanding of the theological significance of the resurrection (and other biblical stories) for themselves.
- Articulate a clear understanding of the theological significance of the resurrection (and other biblical stories) within other traditions.

(D) IN RESPECT OF MINISTERIAL AND PUBLIC LEADERSHIP
• Demonstrate a thorough and critical understanding of how the issues we discuss in this course (e.g., biblical authority, resurrection, virginal conception) might be considered difficult within one’s denomination.
• In their ministry, demonstrate a capacity to guide others through these and other sensitive issues.

**Evaluation**

Requirements

The final grade for the course will be based on evaluations in four areas:

Basic Degree Students:

(1) *Participation* (10%) – In addition to participating in the regular activity of the class, including the reading of the required texts, students are expected to choose one of the “choice” texts and read that as well. Students are encouraged, but not required, to read other choice texts.

(2) *Prepared Notes* (20%) – For all sessions, you will need to turn in one page of notes on the readings from class. These notes do NOT need to be formal and should NOT take long to write; they will primarily function as your reference notes for in-class discussion. These will be collected at the end of class and returned the following session. The notes should do the following:

• Briefly summarize the reading content, making particular note of items you found interesting or surprising.

• Address the following questions: What issues do the scholars disagree on and what is the argumentative basis for this disagreement (i.e., I am NOT looking for “this scholar articulates a Methodist understanding and this one articulates a Catholic understanding”, but the specific exegetical or historical basis for this disagreement)? What biblical passages are used to support this understanding of Jesus? What biblical passages would create difficulty for this understanding?

• Conclude by articulating at least one question you have about the readings.

(3) *Reflection Paper* (20%) – Some time by Session Six, you must turn in a reflection paper that totals 4-6 pages. In this paper, you should argue, as clearly and confidently, as you can, your own position on one of the small group topics and how that issue developed within early Christianity. The paper must be submitted one week after we have discussed the topic in class. The paper should address the following issues:

• What sources attest this issue? What sources do not attest it? Why do you think this is the case?

• What do you think happened historically with the issue? That is, what aspects of these stories (biblical and apocryphal) do you believe to be reliable and what parts not? Why do you understand this to be the case?
(A) **Final paper** (50%) – Two weeks after Session Six, you must turn in a summative paper that totals 12-15 pages. In this assignment you should argue, as clearly and confidently as you can, your own position on how the stories of Jesus’ resurrection developed. This part of the paper must be an historical analysis. The majority of the paper should address the following questions:

- **Was Jesus resurrected?** Include in your answer to this question your definition of “resurrection.”
- **What do you make of the tensions between the different Gospel accounts?** That is, not only the differences between the Gospel resurrection narratives, but their absence in the Sayings Gospel Q and Thomas. Briefly state any points of literary dependence that effect your argument (e.g., Thomas depending on canonical Gospels, Q did not exist, John depends on Synoptic Gospels).
- **In what ways are narratives of Jesus’ resurrection similar to or different from comparable stories in antiquity?** What implications does this have for the resurrection of the historical Jesus?

Finally, conclude with 3-4 pages on the theological implications of your historical analysis. Include in this section answer to the following questions.

- **Assuming you identify as Christian, how does this understanding relate to your denomination’s position on the resurrection and/or the historical reliability of the bible?** If you do not identify as Christian, how does this relate to either your religion’s understanding of these issues (e.g., ascension of Isa) or the Christian creeds (e.g., Nicene and Apostolic Creeds)?

**Grading System**

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Please see the appropriate handbook for more details about the grading scale and non-numerical grades (e.g. SDF, INC, etc.).

**Late work**: Basic Degree students are expected to hand in assignments by the date given in the course outline. [The instructor should stipulate the penalty for late work.] This penalty is not applied to students with medical or compassionate difficulties; students facing such difficulties are kindly requested to consult with their faculty adviser or basic degree director, who should make a recommendation on the matter to the instructor. The absolute deadline for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course. Students who for exceptional reasons (e.g., a death in the family or a serious illness) are unable to complete work by this date may request an extension (SDF = “standing deferred”) beyond the term. An SDF must be requested from the registrar’s
course is taken. The SDF, when approved, will have a mutually agreed upon deadline that does not extend beyond the conclusion of the following term. If a student has not completed work but has not been granted an SDF, a final mark will be submitted calculating a zero for work not submitted.

Course grades. Consistently with the policy of the University of Toronto, course grades submitted by an instructor are reviewed by a committee of the instructor’s college before being posted. Course grades may be adjusted where they do not comply with University grading policy (http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/grading.htm) or college grading policy.

Policies

Accessibility. Students with a disability or health consideration, whether temporary or permanent, are entitled to accommodation. Students in conjoint degree programs must register at the University of Toronto’s Accessibility Services offices; information is available at http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/. The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

Plagiarism. Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes or endnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to his or her head of college or delegate according to the TST Basic Degree Handbook and the Graduate program Handbooks (linked from http://www.tst.edu/academic/resources-forms/handbooks and the University of Toronto Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=4871. A student who plagiarizes in this course will be assumed to have read the document “Avoidance of plagiarism in theological writing” published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges http://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/Library_Archives/Theological_Resources/Tools/Guides/plag.htm.

Other academic offences. TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm.

Back-up copies. Please make back-up copies of essays before handing them in. Physical copies are required for all papers.

Obligation to check email. At times, the course instructor may decide to send out important course information by email. To that end, all students in conjoint programs are required to have a valid utoronto email address. Students must have set up their utoronto email address which is entered in the ACORN system. Information is available at www.utorid.utoronto.ca. The course instructor will not be able to help you with this. 416-978-HELP and the Help Desk at the
Information Commons can answer questions you may have about your UTORid and password. *Students should check utoronto email regularly* for messages about the course. Forwarding your utoronto.ca email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from utoronto.ca addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from your course instructor may end up in your spam or junk mail folder. Students in non-conjoint programs should contact the Registrar of their college of registration.

*Email communication with the course instructor.* The instructor aims to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. *All email communications from students in conjoint programs should be sent from a utoronto email address.* Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also the instructor cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. The instructor is not obliged to respond to email from non-utoronto addresses for students in conjoint programs. Students in non-conjoint programs should only use the email address they have provided to their college of registration.