

## RS113 *New Testament Theology and Ethics* Westmont College Fall, 2007

Instructor: Bruce N. Fisk <[fisk@westmont.edu](mailto:fisk@westmont.edu)>  
Location / time: VL 106; T/Th 3:15 – 5:05  
Office: Porter Center 15. Phone/voice mail: 565-7020  
Office Hours: Monday: 11:30 – 1:00 (in office, DC or Study, as arranged)  
Tuesday: 9:00 - 10:30 (in office, DC or Study, as arranged)  
Otherwise by appointment.

### Catalog Description

Theological and ethical themes of the New Testament, their origins and development, similarities and differences.

Fisk's midrash: For all our claims to live *under* Biblical authority, for all our zeal to have our lives *shaped by* Jesus' teachings, for all our reputation to be *people of the book*, there remains much confusion and ambivalence about how to move from Scripture to life, from text to theology and ethics. How can a book so much of which is (implicitly or explicitly) *narrative* be our canon, our rule of life? What does it mean for an ancient collection to be a sacred text? Questions such as these shall animate this course.

### Course Objectives

Students who succeed in this course will:

1. encounter, understand and appreciate a range of models for reading the New Testament.
2. hear and understand individual New Testament voices on their own terms.
3. appreciate how the New Testament speaks with many voices and with one Voice.
4. discover and embrace a range of practical, responsible ways to read, interpret and apply Scripture.
5. be equipped to struggle with a range of ethical issues including violence, divorce, homosexuality, racism, abortion and poverty, in light of New Testament teaching.
6. begin to understand the significance of Jesus' death and appreciate the many ways Jesus' followers have taken up the challenge to explain it.
7. recognize the irreducibly apocalyptic nature of early Judaism, the New Testament and Christian faith.
8. be able to distinguish between, and weigh the merits of, various models of eschatology in terms of how responsibly they handle scripture and how they narrate and anticipate the final triumph of God.
9. grasp how New Testament ethics are only embraced when they are embodied.
10. appreciate the value of diversity in New Testament interpretation without losing their zeal to read the New Testament responsibly, soundly and faithfully.

### Course Texts

*New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (NRSV). Oxford, 1991, 1994.  
Baker, Mark D. *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of the Atonement*. Baker, 2006.  
Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.  
Hill, Craig C. *In God's Time: The Bible and the Future*. Eerdmans, 2002.

### Reserve Readings and Handouts

Bryan, Christopher. *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower*. Oxford, 2005.  
Carroll, John T. and Joel B. Green, "The Death of Jesus and the Meaning of the Atonement" in *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity*. Hendrickson, 1995. Pp. 256-279.  
Fisk, Bruce N. "Abortion" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Ed., W. Elwell. Baker, 1996. Pp. 2-6.

- Green, Joel B. and Baker, Mark D. *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*. IVP, 2000.
- Guelich, Robert A. "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti" in *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Spring 1991, 33-64.
- Harink, Doug. *Paul among the Postliberals*. Brazos, 2003.
- Hays, Richard B. *The Art of Reading Scripture*. Eerdmans, 2003.
- Keener, Craig. *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's ministry in the Letters of Paul*. Hendrickson, 1992.
- Kirsch, Jonathan. *A History of the End of the World*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.
- McKnight, Scot. "The Hermeneutics of Confessing Jesus as Lord." *Ex Auditu* 14 (1998) 1-17 (handout).
- Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Fortress, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*. HarperCollins, 2005.

## Assignments and Evaluation

### 1. Reading and class discussion (25%)

Follow the Schedule carefully, taking concise notes on what you read. Make use of endnotes and look up biblical passages central to the argument. Below your reading notes, compose one or two discussion questions for class, based on the readings. These may be:

- descriptive – about the meaning of a passage in the NT or the text
- synthetic – about how one biblical passage relates to another
- hermeneutical – about the links (or gaps) between the NT world and our own
- pragmatic – about the implications of NT teaching for specific, concrete theological / moral / ethical questions

Bring your notes and questions to class. You may be asked to read them aloud, share them in small groups, hand them in, or all of the above. Rather than take attendance, I will record those who attend with class texts, a (full-sized) Bible and reading notes.

Each of you will also sign up to be the designated catalyst for class discussion on one or two class days. Assuming you are doing your reading and taking notes, this should require minimal extra preparation and will simply mean you take greater responsibility on your day to insure that class conversation is lively and productive.

### 2. Service Project & Report (5 + 40 = 45%)

Identify an ethical issue that meets the following criteria:

- You can show that your study of the New Testament has explicitly informed your approach to the issue and shaped your imagination, values and behavior. (A final, written report will make this case.)
- The issue is of relevance to the Santa Barbara community. (This does not mean global or international issues are off limits but only that your issue must have a local connection.)
- You have sufficient time to research and engage the issue during the course of the semester.
- Your project involves (but is not limited to) some steps of practical service or societal engagement. (This could mean many things: volunteering with an existing organization; gathering, analyzing and presenting helpful data; interviews; hospital or seniors' home visitation; lobbying for needed social/political change; establishing a group; etc. Beyond research and coordination, plan on at least four hours of direct service / engagement.)

Clear your topic with me and then, **by September 27**, submit a 1-2 page **proposal** (worth 5%). Late submissions will lose 0.5 % per weekday. No extensions. Work ahead. The proposal should contain a title, your name(s), a preliminary bibliography and three paragraphs addressing the following three topics:

1. New Testament passages and themes relevant for your project.

2. A description of the specific issue or topic, noting specific connections to your local social context. Note: you are not here describing a ministry or social service; you are outlining an ethical question / issue / social problem.
3. Preliminary ideas about what your service component might entail. At this stage you should have done preliminary investigation into possible venues for involvement but you need not have made final decisions or arrangements.

Your **bibliography** should include at least ten sources (monographs, commentaries, articles; no more than two encyclopedia/dictionary articles; no more than three web sites). Use the *ATLA* data base for topical and textual searches in Religious Studies. (From the Library Homepage select Religious Studies under “Subject Research.”) Do NOT use public domain commentaries unless you have my approval first.

Your **final submission** is due November 27. It will be a full report (15-20 pages), divided into three parts:

1. New Testament perspectives on your topic.  
Devote roughly half your paper to themes and texts in the New Testament that inform your approach to the issue. Draw upon the work of credible biblical scholars and theologians to explore interpretive issues and assess conflicting interpretations.
2. Application and integration.  
Devote one quarter to one third of your paper to the task of bringing your Biblical research to bear on the contemporary issue. This is where you build a hermeneutical bridge to the modern context. How did your N.T. research affect the way you approached your issue? How has sustained reflection on Scripture informed and affected your orientation, strategies and goals?
3. Narrative.  
Offer an account of your experiences, lessons learned and insights, based upon your time of practical service or societal engagement. Has your engagement raised new interpretive questions?

**Evaluation criteria:** a good paper will show evidence of critical thinking, fair-minded judgment and the use of substantial sources. Guidelines for **format**, citations, footnotes, bibliography and more are available in the *SBL Handbook of Style Student Supplement*, available as a pdf on Eureka. Please adopt proper English style (grammar, spelling, punctuation) and standard form (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, page numbers, staple). Aim to avoid metalanguage (e.g., "I think that..."; "The interesting thing is"; "The next point I want to make is"). In your analysis aim for clarity; in your critique be thoughtful and fair. All citations and other forms of indebtedness must be shown clearly in footnotes or endnotes. Anyone who presents someone else's written ideas or work as one's own is guilty of **plagiarism**. (See class Eureka page for additional resources on these matters.) Infractions will be taken very seriously and may result in an F for the course. When in doubt, ask.

**Supplemental components** (CD, DVD, website, interview transcripts, data, attachments, published literature, etc.) are encouraged but they should not replace the substance of your report.

**Late projects** will suffer a reduction of one third of a letter grade per day. The highest grade awarded for a late paper is B (85%).

### 3. Final Exam (30%)

I will likely provide a list of essay questions in advance from which I will ultimately select the final exam questions. There will probably also be an objective section, testing your knowledge of the NT (location of key passages, central teaching of principal texts, etc.). Student input is welcome. Cheating (e.g., inappropriately giving or receiving information, using notes during a test), will be taken very seriously. At minimum the exam will earn an F (0%) which means the highest grade for the course would be C- (70%).

### Grading Scale

	A	95-100	A-	90-94	
B+	87-89	B	84-86	B-	80-83
C+	77-79	C	74-76	C-	70-73
D+	67-69	D	64-66	D-	60-63
	F	0-59			

## Course Schedule

8-28 **Introduction; Syllabus**

8-30 **Approaches to Reading the New Testament**

Reading Hays, 1-11, 207-214  
Skim: Outler, "Quadrilateral" (Eureka)  
Web: Modes of Appeal, Sources of Authority (Eureka)

### I. NEW TESTAMENT VOICES: Soundings in Theology & Ethics

9-4 **Paul** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading Hays, 16-59  
Reserve: Harink, *Postliberals*, 25-45 (skim 45-65)  
*1 Thessalonians*  
*Romans 8*  
*1 Corinthians 3, 7-11*  
*Philippians 2-3*  
*Galatians 5*  
Web: Paul, Eschatology and Ethics (Eureka)

9-6 **Pauline Tradition** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading Hays, 60-72  
*Ephesians*  
*1 Timothy 2-3*  
Web: Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare" (Eureka)

9-11 **Mark** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading Hays, 73-92  
*Gospel of Mark*  
Web: Mark's Christology (Eureka)  
Web: Discipleship in Mark (Eureka)

9-13 **Matthew** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading Hays, 93-111  
*Gospel of Matthew*  
Web: Matthew's Kingdom Ethics (Eureka)  
Web: Walking on Water: Historiography in the Gospels (Eureka)

9-18 **Luke-Acts** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading Hays, 112-137  
*Gospel of Luke, Acts*  
Reserve: Bryan, *Render*, 95-105  
Web: Luke's Eschatology (Eureka)

9-20 **Gospel and Epistles of John** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading Hays, 138-157  
*Gospel of John*

\_ - \_ Screening: ***Jesus of Montreal*** Time & Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
(browse Eureka link in advance)

9-25 **Historical Jesus** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading Hays, 158-168  
Reserve: McKnight: "Hermeneutics"

9-27 **Revelation** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Hays, 169-185  
*Revelation*  
Reserve: Kirsch, *History*, 1-18

## II. CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL ISSUES: New Testament Perspectives

10-2 **Diversity in the Canon; Three Images**  
Reading Hays, 187-205  
*Matthew 5 – 7*

10-4 **Using the Texts; Violence** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Hays, 291-346  
*Matthew 5*  
*Matthew 10:34; Luke 22:36; Mark 11:15-19*

10-9 No class Fall Holiday

10-11 **Divorce and Remarriage** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Hays, 347-378  
*Mark 10:2-12; Matt 5:31-32; 19; Luke 16:18*  
*1 Corinthians 7*  
Web: Marriage/Divorce/Remarriage in the Gospels (Eureka)  
Web: Marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:1-16 (Eureka)  
Web: 1 Corinthians 7:25-35 (Eureka)

10-16 **Homosexuality** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Hays, 379-406  
*Romans 1*  
*1 Corinthians 6*

10-18 **Anti-Judaism and Ethnic Conflict** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Hays, 407-443  
*Romans 9-11*  
*Matthew 21; 23; 27:24-25*  
*Luke 13:31-35; 19:41-44*  
*John 8*  
*Acts 3*

10-23 **Abortion; Wealth and Possessions** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Hays, 444-470  
Reserve: Fisk, "Abortion"  
*Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35*

## III. THE DARKEST DAY: Images, Metaphors and Meaning of the Cross

10-25 **Atonement, Magic & Coffee** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Baker, 13-61 [Baker, Lewis, Mathewes-Green, Friesen]  
Reserve: Carroll & Green, "Death of Jesus"

10-30 **Scapegoats, Beach Volleyball & Viruses** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Baker, 62-102 [Blue, Whitmarsh, Williams, Baker, Hays]  
Reserve: Wright, *Jesus*, 592-611

11-1 **Whale Rider, Saving Face and the God of the Big Eye** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Baker, 103-152 [Taylor, McLaren, Frank, May, McNichols]  
Reserve: Green & Baker, *Recovering*, 153-170.

11-6 **Golgotha, Zimbabwe & Saskatchewan** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Baker, 153-189 [Schellenberg, Muzorewa, Chang, Todd, Baker]

#### IV. THE LAST DAY: New Testament Eschatology and the Christian Imagination

11-8 **The Bible** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Hill, 1-29  
Reserve: Keener, *Paul, Women*, 70-88  
*Mark 6 & 7*  
*1 Corinthians 14*

11-13 **The History of the Future** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Hill, 30-58  
*Deuteronomy 18*  
*Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12*  
*Malachi 4*

11-15 **Apocalypse Then** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Hill, 59-93  
*Isaiah 24-27*  
*Ezekiel 38-39*  
*1 Enoch 37-71* (skim; Eureka)

11-20 No class Compensation for screening of *Jesus of Montreal*

11-22 No class Thanksgiving Break

11-27 **Daniel and Revelation** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Hill, 94-129  
*Daniel 7-12*  
*Revelation*

11-29 **Jesus and Things to Come** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Hill, 130-169  
*Luke 4*  
*Acts 1*  
*Mark 13-14*

12-4 **Once and Future Kingdom** Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reading Hill, 170-209  
*Romans 8*  
*1 Thessalonians 4*

12-6 **Reflections and Project Reports: The New Testament World and Ours**  
Reading Hays, *Art of Reading*, 218-238  
*John 2*  
*Mark 12*  
*Luke 24*  
Reserve: Wright, *The Last Word*, 106-142