Course Rationale and Description

In one sentence
This course explores how portrayals of social minorities in the Gospel of Matthew can be interpreted in various cultural contexts, both past and present.

Long Description

“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Matt 25:34–35)

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt 22:39)

“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 18:3)

The Gospel of Matthew is perhaps one of the most-cited biblical books in the U.S. public sphere, and we have often heard these three passages from Matthew in recent debates on the refugee crisis and immigration. Indeed, this gospel contains a variety of stories about the weak, the vulnerable, and the marginalized, who carry in themselves rich theological ideas about suffering, healing, love, social justice, and salvation. Yet, the question of how we as church leaders and global citizens should read these stories in today’s world leads us into the challenging task of considering contested and complicated views on minorities in history and culture.

As a way of engaging such an interpretive issue, this course explores the stories that Matthew tells us about the lives of others. We will first investigate ways in which this gospel constructs women, children, slaves, foreigners, people with disabilities, and other social outcasts in its historical and literary setting. Special attention will be given to the first-century colonial context of Judea and Syria, early Judaism, and Matthew’s literary sources and redactions. While drawing upon the critical insights gained from such historical contextualization, we will also discuss how Matthew’s stories might help us better engage with the lives of others in ministry and public life. We will read Matthew from our own social locations and consider a wide range of topics, such as racial justice, sexual differences, disability rights, anti-Judaism, and colonization. Sharing various perspectives on the biblical portrayals of the “other,” we will ultimately reflect on the implications Matthew’s stories may harbor for our culturally diverse and politically divided world.
Objectives (Course Learning Outcomes):

This course is designed to help students develop exegetical “skills for visionary Christian leadership in the public sphere” (LSTC mission statement). In particular, this course allows students to meet the following learning competencies:

- **#2 Scripture** (M.Div., M.A.T.S., M.A.M.): The student draws the wisdom of our forebears in the faith in Scripture into active engagement with emerging challenges.
- **#4 Ministry Arts and Public Leadership** (M.Div., M.A.M.): The student articulates and models embodiment of the gospel or other religious convictions in ways that are culturally sensitive, inclusive, and responsive to the personal and public dimensions of people’s sorrows and hopes.
- **#5 Cultural Context** (M.Div., M.A.M.) and **#4** (M.A.T.S.): The student manifests the ability to know, interpret, and affect particular situations, values, and meanings through methodologically grounded historical, socio-cultural, ethical readings/analysis of the Christian or another religious heritage and broadly cultural-historical traditions.
- **#2 Preaching** (Ministry Arts and Public Leadership skills): The student interprets Scripture in ways that generate new insights into text and context.
- **#5 Leadership for Mission** (Ministry Arts and Public Leadership skills): The student embodies graciousness in welcoming and including strangers and commits to hospitality and the diversity of their context.

Specifically, this course will allow students to do the following:

1. Analyze ways in which the Gospel of Matthew theologically and rhetorically presents the “other” in its historical context
2. Learn about diverse cultural perspectives on minorities and explore various hermeneutical approaches (e.g., historical-critical, feminist, womanist, postcolonial, queer)
3. Understand both historical distances and cross-cultural parallels between the ancient text and our context
4. Consider seriously the relationship between scriptural interpretation and public discourse in a variety of social locations
5. Navigate ways to foster an ethically responsible and culturally sensitive biblical interpretation at personal, ministerial, and public levels

Strategies for Learning

Please know that we are full members of our small, democratic academic community, in which we share both freedom and responsibility with one another. Your active and engaged participation in each class session is key to making all of us successful in this course. Therefore, I ask the following of you:

- Please read the assigned readings, both biblical texts and scholarly writings, before coming to each class.
- I would love to see your face each and every time. So would your classmates. Unexcused absences from class will incur grade penalty: your participation grade will be lowered by a third of a letter for each class missed.
• Be vocal and feel free to jump in during class discussions if you have a question. Please do not hesitate to share any insight emerging from your social location. If you prefer or if you miss the chance to speak up in class, feel free to bring up your questions and concerns in office hours.

• When you respond to fellow students in class, please show respect. It is equally as important to listen well as to speak well.

• Plan ahead and allow enough time to write papers. Our writing requirements are not extremely long, and papers written with clarity (and grace) will be deeply appreciated.

Assessment

1) Participation (15%): Punctual and regular attendance, careful listening, and engaging in conversation during the class. Participation in class field trip (TBA).

2) Oral Presentation/Seminar Discussion (20%): Choose a topic/date from the course schedule and prepare a brief oral presentation on the topic of your choice. You will also collaborate with me to lead a class discussion on that day. More details to follow.

3) Midterm Exam (15%): This in-class exam consists of ID questions and one short essay.

4) Book Review (20%): Choose a book or an article from the course readings that you find helpful and relevant for your final paper. With a brief summary, please provide a critical and constructive evaluation of the reading. Max. 1,200 words.

5) Final Paper (30%): Exegesis paper on a specific pericope of Matthew or a specific theme emerging from this gospel. Your analysis should reflect your own cultural context. 12–15 pages (double-spaced, normal margins, font size 12).

Required Texts


Recommended Texts


