Course Profile

Course # and Title  RHS 601 Jesus the Healer: Restoring the Body, Community, and Earth in New Testament and Early Christian Perspectives

Instructor: Barbara Rossing  Semester/Year: Fall 2019, Wednesday 8-11 am

Course Rationale and Description

The Gospel of Mark and other synoptic gospels devote almost one-fifth of their writing to the various ways Jesus restores health and life. This seminar on healing will bring together recent New Testament and interdisciplinary scholarship on illness and healing, focusing on Mark. We will draw on multiple approaches in order to read divine healing not primarily in individualistic “interventionist” or super-natural miraculous terms, but rather as part of part of the world that itself includes spiritual power for healing.

Colonial (Roman) occupation and the cultural construction of illness and disease are critical lenses through which we will examine healing and exorcism stories. Grounded in the ancient Jewish-biblical and Greco-Roman contexts, we will explore intersections of discourses: Jesus’ healing in social-scientific and liberation perspectives; empire-critical and post-colonial analysis of exorcism and healing in traditional cultures; medical anthropology, cross-cultural and evolutionary anthropology studies in healing; comparative study of ancient healers and miracle-workers (such as Asclepius) and archeological study of their sanctuaries; historical Jesus studies; disability studies; feminist and womanist scholarship on healing; neuro-science and other scientific perspectives; ecological healing and ecological hermeneutics.

We will also consider metaphorical dimensions of healing, including the trajectory of "Christ the Healer" (Christus Medicus) in early Patristic texts, as well as the Jewish Tikkun Olam ("Mending the World") tradition, and prophetic uses of the illness metaphor to critique socio-economic abuses. We will explore how a theology of healing for our bodies and souls, and also for the whole world, might help address today’s global ecological crisis from a perspective of environmental illness and world-healing.

This is an advanced graduate seminar for ThM and PhD students, and for MDiv and MA students interested in advanced exegetical work. (Pre-requisite: Jesus Within Judaism or Intro to the Gospels).

Weeks 1-2 will focus on ancient texts and contexts (Jewish and Greco-Roman), including primary source reading in ancient medical texts. Weeks 3-9 Gospel of Mark healing stories from various methodologies, including form-critical, literary, socio-rhetorical, comparative anthropological, and post-colonial and disability approaches. Weeks 10-12 ecological hermeneutics (including Hebrew Bible), religion and science, post-biblical trajectories, and student paper presentations.

Course Learning Outcomes (Learners will be able to):

Deepen their competency in Religious Heritage: Scripture: Drawing the wisdom of our forebears in the faith in Scripture into active engagement with emerging challenges.

In this course, students will specifically be able to:

1. increase their competence in Greek translation (for those with biblical language skills) and/or substitute assignments (for those without Greek skills) and analysis of primary texts (Th.M. Outcome 2, 6; Ph.D. 3).
2. ask critical questions on the primary and secondary literature (Th.M. Outcome 3; Ph.D 1).
3. practice methodological skills in New Testament interpretation (Th.M. Outcome 2; Ph.D. 2, 3).
4. develop research and exegetical skills for writing a research seminar paper, drawing on primary and secondary sources; and for writing reviews of other scholars' work (Outcomes M. Div. #2, 3; MATS #2, 3; MAM #2, 3; Th.M. #2, 3, 6; Ph.D. #2, 5, 6)
5. critically evaluate theological perspectives on the Bible and Healing in light of contemporary theological and ethical realities. (Outcomes M. Div. #4, 6; MATS #2, 3, 4; MAM #2, 3; Th.M. #5; Ph.D.
6. familiarize themselves with gender and feminist studies relating to the Bible (Th.M. Outcome 5; Ph.D. 2).

Additionally, students will be able to:
- examine the roles sickness and health play in biblical thought;
- interpret the Gospel of Mark from a variety of critical perspectives;
- interpret Jesus’ healings and exorcisms in literary-critical, form-critical, and other perspectives;
- evaluate constructions of illness and healing in the Ancient Near East and Greco-Roman culture;
- situate the interpretative trajectory of "miracle stories" in the history of New Testament scholarship;
- apply these insights to contemporary situations of illness and healing, including ecological healing

Strategies for Learning:
Because the course is a seminar focused on analysis by class members, preparation for class is essential. The value of the seminar to all will be directly dependent on the quality of the preparation which each of the class members brings to class. A set of readings in the biblical text and in secondary sources is assigned for each class session. These assignments should be completed as preparation for the class session for which they are assigned, in light of the questions for discussion and analysis which accompany them. Each class will also include Greek translation.

Writing Requirements: 3 papers:
- One longer, 15- to 25-page original research paper, distributed in advance to all seminar members for discussion (topic to be chosen in consultation with instructor).
- A 3-5 page "comment paper" reviewing one or more readings for one day, emailed in advance to all seminar participants, for class discussion that day;
- Response paper to a colleague's seminar paper (3-5 pages); sermon may be substituted for MDiv.

Late Paper Policy: Given the seminar structure of the course, NO late papers permitted.

Assessment:
Students will be graded on:
- Their participation in Greek translation (alternate assignments available for MDiv's) (10%);
- The acumen and clarity of their comment paper reviewing one of the readings (15%);
- participation in the class dialogue about the assigned readings each week (10%)
- The persuasiveness of their seminar paper including re-writing based on feedback (50%).
- Their response paper to the seminar papers of others, helping advance the argument of the paper constructively (15%).

Required Bibliography:

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<th>Text Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus (Orbis)</td>
<td>Ched Meyers</td>
<td>Any edition fine; 978-1570757976 or an earlier edition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense and Stigma in the Gospels: Depictions of Sensory-Disabled Characters (Oxford)</td>
<td>Louise Lawrence</td>
<td>978-0199590094</td>
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- Articles and book chapters on course website and on Reserve

**Recommended Reading** (more will be added, especially on Mark's Gospel; one or more title may become Required)

- Chitando, Ezra and Charles Klagba, eds., *In the Name of Jesus! Healing in the Age of HIV* (WCC 2013)
- Davies, Stephen. *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity*
- Fanon, Franz, *The Wretched of the Earth*
- Horsley, Richard. *Jesus and the Powers: Conflict, Covenant and the Hope of the Poor* (Fortress, 2011)
- Myers, Ched. *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Orbis, 1988)
- Townes, Emily. *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African American Health Issues and a Womanist Ethic of Care* (Continuum, 2001)
- Weissenrieder, Annette and Gregor Etzelmüller, eds., *Religion and Illness* (Wipf & Stock, 2016)