

Course Description

(1-Page)

Course Number: BI259

Course Title: Reading NT Cultures: Values, Structures & Conflicts

Name of Instructor: Ritva Williams

Semester and Year: Spring 2021

Requirement fulfilled, who may register, indicate if limited: Elective, Synchronous

Number of hours, grading option: 1 credit; letter grade or credit/no credit

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The New Testament gospels and letters were written long ago by and for people who lived in places far away. Material goods and ideas that we take for granted simply didn't exist in the worlds of Jesus and Paul. Yet the authors and first audiences of our NT narratives and letters were human beings just like us (biologically). They had families and friends, went to work, worshipped God, but within societies that were organized in ways we find strange, even repugnant (for example, gender hierarchies). Unfamiliar values such as honor, shame, purity, and limited good shaped daily behavior. The NT authors and first audiences argued, sometimes passionately, and even engaged in cultural conflict, but the issues were quite different from our modern culture wars. When we read the NT narratives and letters, we do so with lenses that are 2000 years thick, resulting in unintended anachronistic and ethnocentric interpretations. In this course we will focus on reading the NT texts with greater awareness and sensitivity for the cultural distance that separates us from their authors and first audiences. Historically and culturally contextual readings enable us to be more like that scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven described by Jesus in Matthew 13:52, bringing out of their treasury what is new and what is old.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To explore the ancient Mediterranean cultural values, structures and conflicts that shaped the NT (*Practice of Engagement with Cross-Cultural and Global Dimensions*).
2. To practice historically and culturally contextual biblical exegesis and interpretation (*Practice of Biblical and Theological Wisdom*).
3. To demonstrate an understanding of the differences between 21st century American cultural values, structures and conflicts and those of the NT world. (*Practice of Complex Analysis*)
4. To reflect on the implications of these differences for how we preach and teach NT texts (*Practice of Personal Faith and Integrity*).

PROCEDURE:

The one weekly meeting time will feature plenary teaching and discussion in person and/or by Zoom.

EVALUATION:

Evaluation will be based on weekly participation and discussion/reflection forums, and an integrative project that includes exegetical preparation for preaching or teaching.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Required Texts (class discussions will be based on these texts)

K.C. Hanson & Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts*. Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-8006-6309-4

Ritva H. Williams, "Purity, Dirt, Anomalies, and Abominations," in *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, edited by Dietmar Neufeld & Richard E. DeMaris, London & NY: Routledge 2010. ISBN: 978-0-415-77582-3

Recommended Texts (these texts will be valuable resources for student's assignments)

Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes – Cultural Studies in the Gospels*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-8308-2568-4.

Zeba A. Crook (ed), *The Ancient Mediterranean Social World – A Sourcebook*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7356-9

Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World – Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, Third Edition, Revised & Expanded. Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001. ISBN: 0-664-22295-1

Bruce J. Malina, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Second Edition. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008. ISBN: 0-8006-3491-8

Bruce J. Malina, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Second Edition. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998. ISBN: 0-8006-2992-2

Dietmar Neufeld & Richard E. DeMaris (eds), *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, London & NY: Routledge 2010. ISBN: 978-0-415-77582-3

Jerome H. Neyrey (ed), *The Social World of Luke-Acts – Models for Interpretation*. Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991. ISBN: 1-56563-512-4

John J. Pilch & Bruce J. Malina, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, Third Edition. Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4982-8964-1

J. Brian Tucker & Coleman A. Baker (eds), *T & T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament*. London & NY: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-567-37954-2