

Hi! I'm Bridget Mary Meehan. Welcome to PCS 505- A New New Testament. Our primary text for this course is A New, New Testament edited by Hal Taussig. We also provide additional resources and invite you to share your recommendations with us.

The goal of our course is to provide a more expansive view of beliefs, practices, teachings and stories in Christianity in the first and second centuries. Our process is to compare and contrast newly discovered texts with the traditional gospels, and to relate their meaning to contemporary life.

We invite you to use a wholistic, integrative spiritual approach in your studies and assignment reflections .

1. Read personally as if it was written to you. How does the sacred text inspire or challenge you? You don't have to agree with text, but it is important make connections from your knowledge and life experiences.
2. Read thoughtfully. Think about the time and social setting in which the sacred texts were written what it might have meant then and what it means now. Read Introductions and Companion section near end of book.
3. Read imaginatively. Let the images, insights move your mind and heart. For example how does a feminine or masculine God relate to you and to people in the 21st century.
4. Read meditatively or prayerfully. What messages make you feel loved? What words inspire, challenge or confuse you. Give thanks. Linger on words or phrases that bless you.

Scholars remind us that there were multiple views about Christian belief and values at the heart of Christianity in the first two centuries.

Christianity developed from basic unstructured charismatic ecclesial communities to hierarchical orders. Karen King observes that "leadership was shared among men and women according to the movement of the Spirit in inspiring gifts of prophecy, teaching, healing, administration and service while in others it was much more patriarchal" p. 528)

This course may raise more questions than it will answer about being Christian in a pluralistic world with diverse spiritualities, cultures and communities.

We look forward to reading your reflections and engaging in conversations online about these topics. .

Thank you.

Session 1 Gospel of Thomas and Gospel of Matthew

Some points for reflection/discussion from Introduction to texts:

The Gospel of Thomas focuses on Jesus as Teacher, attributes 114 sayings to Jesus.

Sayings in Thomas are similar to about fifty in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. About 50 in Gospel of Thomas are different and evoke interesting new insights into the wisdom of Jesus.

Some scholars believe that Thomas was the first Gospel written.

Similarities and Differences About Teachings of Jesus in Synoptic Gospels and in Thomas

Like the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and Letters of Paul, the Gospel of Thomas relates the “the realm of God “to specific life experiences. (Neither Gospels of John or Mary do.)

Jesus teaches in Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. In Thomas Jesus’ teachings do not include an emphasis on saving death, resurrection or healing.

“The realm of God” in Thomas relates to an earthly reality. “When you give birth to the one within you, that one will save you. If you do not have that one within you, that one will kill you.” (Thomas 70)

The Gospel of Matthew describes cataclysmic events of judgment at the end of time. The Gospel of Thomas emphasizes a cosmic, mystical view about the origins of life and the world. In v. 50 Jesus identifies humans as those who came from where the light came into being.

“Blessed is the one who takes a stand in the beginning. That one will know the end and will not experience death.” (Thomas 18)

Matthew’s Gospel demonstrates Jesus teaching a process of community reconciliation that will help disciples resolve problems and live together in community. (In contrast, the disciples in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus seems irritated with the disciples who do not understand his mission and don’t seem incapable of doing the right thing.)

Context and Scholarship: Stories of Christian Beginnings;

Christianity has evolved in the first two centuries from basic unstructured charismatic ecclesial communities to hierarchical orders. Scholar Dr. Karen King describes the painstaking scholarship of presenting the diversity of early Christian life and reflection. “We are only beginning to construct the pieces of a fuller and more accurate narrative of Christian beginnings. At this point I can only say that it will be a story of diverse groups of people engaged the difficult business of working out what it means to be a Christian in a world of rapid change, increased intercultural contact and dominated overall by Roman imperial power” (Gospel of Mary Magdala, p.169)

Leadership in some groups was shared among men and women according to the movement of the Spirit in inspiring gifts of prophecy, teaching, healing, administration and service while in others it was much more patriarchal. (p. 528)

