

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES 450 SEMINAR  
PROPHETS, MESSIAHS AND THEIR FOLLOWERS  
COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON  
FALL 2015**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

In this seminar, we delve into some pivotal scholarly issues in the ongoing debates, past and present, surrounding the “founding figures,” and origins generally, in three religious traditions: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Our primary focus is less on what these figures may or may not have taught per se - although this is certainly relevant for assessing their position vis-a-vis the society they purportedly addressed - and more concerned with matters of historiography, presentation, authority, legitimacy, and the construction of identity (among their followers) in each tradition. Particular attention is given to the application of social science theories or models - primarily, but not solely, Weber’s notion of charisma and later revisions of it - and the extent to which these may or may not explain the reception of a founder’s teaching and continuing existence and “success” of these traditions. Beyond this, we consider the role of the modern scholar in such quests and the extent to which their own identity and socio-political and/or religious location shapes their construction of a founding figure and his early community. Any detailed examination of such figures raises a host of questions, the answers to which at times depend on who one asks: What types of sources do we possess and how far removed chronologically are they from the putative historical figure they describe? Who produced these sources and what, if anything, do they tell us about their subject, as opposed to the later views and needs of the communities that produced them? Do these figures bring something new or unique to the tradition, or are they simply reformers of the status quo, with teachings or actions explainable in their times? How do we account for the success and spread of these movements? Are there common or universal elements in each of these figures; do they confirm to an ideal type constructed by the modern scholar, or must we consider each unique in their situation and appeal? Moreover, how might we account for the very notion of, or need for, a founding figure in some of these traditions? Lastly, given the overwhelming majority of pious followers know nothing of such academic quests, why bother with the painstaking, problematic process of searching for the “real” or “historical” Jesus or Buddha or Muhammad? Would dubious or outright fabricated sources change a loyal adherent’s view of the founder or tradition? Why muddy the waters with our obsession with origins, which, again, often reveals more about the modern interpreter than any ancient figure or movement. What is the role of the modern scholar of religion - whether insider or outsider - in discussing her or his work?

**GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

In dealing with messiahs and their movements, the course addresses the following two GenEd learning outcomes: (1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted, or valued in various expressions of human culture; and (2) Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret that material in writing assignments. These outcomes will be assessed by means of a *Passage Analysis Assignment* involving a reading(s) not covered on the syllabus.

## DEPARTMENTAL STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- 1) Students should recognize and be able to explain the major theoretical perspectives and key issues of debate in the academic study of religion.
- 2) Students understand, interpret, and contextualize primary texts from one or more religious traditions.
- 3) Students will demonstrate effective writing skills with the ability to craft an argument in defense of a coherent thesis statement using and analyzing supporting evidence from primary and secondary sources.

## REQUIRED TEXTS:

- 1) Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.
- 2) John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. HarperCollins, 1994. Reprinted in 2009.
- 3) Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam* (Belknap/Harvard, 2010)
- 4) M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- 5) John S. Strong, *The Buddha: A Short Biography*. Oneworld Publications, 2001.
- 6) A Biblical text. My preference is the New Revised Standard Version, available in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Ed. Michael Coogan et al., (Oxford University Press, 2010). Other translations are acceptable, although a few do contain significant differences in some cases.
- 7) Numbered readings for the course are available on Oaks (via MyCharleston).

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) *Class presentations (10%)*. Over the course of the term, students will give brief presentations on TWO readings, designated by me as presentation material. These need be no more than 8-10 minutes in length and should provide an accurate summary of the key points or arguments of the reading, and offer some critical analysis where appropriate (a one page outline is recommended). Also, presenters should submit discussion questions for the class generally. Following each presentation, I will call on individual students to ask questions (critical or otherwise) in order to initiate classroom discussion of the material. If you miss your presentation without an incredibly good excuse (dead or dying), you will receive a failing grade on it. **All students are required to read the assigned material relative to class and submit informed, nay even intelligent, questions for discussion at the beginning of class.**
- 2) *Two shorter papers (10% each)*. As we progress (or regress) through the readings on Jesus/early Christianity and Muhammad/early Islam, you will be assigned two shorter papers (4-5 pages). The first will deal primarily, but not exclusively, with Crossan and the application of social science models to the historical Jesus, while the second will deal with the same regarding Muhammad. An assignment sheet with questions and specific instructions on format etc. will be distributed in class.
- 3) *Take-home midterm exam (20%)*. This midterm will of a series of questions over the first portion of the term. Students may not consult one another or otherwise work together on this exam. Any indication of such will be considered plagiarism following college honor code policy (as outlined on the sheet signed by you).

4) *A Research paper (35%)*. Students are required to turn in a research paper in order to pass this course. The paper will be at least 12-15 pages in length (not counting endnotes or bibliography) and must be theoretical and comparative in orientation, encompassing at least two separate traditions. Also, subject to my approval, you may include figures and traditions not dealt with in this course. Specific guidelines for the paper (choosing a topic, style, timeline for submission, etc.) will be distributed after the beginning of the term. This process will occur in three stages: submit assignment topic for approval, annotated bibliography, first rough draft with summary of arguments and conclusions.

5) *Attendance/Participation (15%)*. This is a seminar, not a lecture class, although I will most likely do some lecturing at times. Because of this, and the small class size, it is imperative that you attend class and participate in discussions. You are permitted a total of **THREE** absences, for whatever reason, over the course of the term. Any number greater than this could result in a lowered or failing grade for the course. As for reading assignments and participation in class, **I will assume that you have read the material before coming to class** and I will not summarize the points or arguments. Students should expect to be called upon to respond to questions about the readings. Languid, lethargic, and otherwise listless students will be noted in my black book and singled out for public flogging (ok, just kidding, but you get the point). In addition, I reserve the right to assign other writing assignments and/or to give unannounced quizzes if you are not keeping up with the material; these will also count in my determination of your grade.

**GRADING SCALE:** Final grades are determined in accordance with the following scale:

A = 100-94	C = 75-73
A- = 93-90	C- = 72-70
B+ = 89-86	D+ = 69-66
B = 85-83	D = 65-62
B- = 82-80	D- = 61-59
C+ = 79-76	F = 58-

## **LECTURE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

*This schedule is subject to revision.* Please bring all relevant materials (along with engaged cerebral matter) to class! Note on Oaks readings: Do not panic. We will not be reading and discussing every last one of these. Many are listed for your future reference and/or use (should they prove relevant) in formulating a topic for and/or writing up your research papers.

### **I. Introduction**

What is a founding figure and why does it matter?

### **II. Weber's Charisma and its Development - Aug. 31 – Sept. 2**

Max Weber, "The Prophet" (Oaks #1); "Charismatic Authority" and "Charisma and its Transformation" (selections from *Economy and Society*; Oaks #2-2a)

Miyahara, "Charisma: From Weber to Contemporary Sociology" (Oaks #3)

Wallis, "Charisma and Explanation" (#4)

Wach, "Types of Religious Authority" (#5)

Optional: Barnes, "Charisma and Religious Leadership: An Historical Analysis" (Oaks #6)  
Dow, "An Analysis of Weber's Work on Charisma" (#7)  
Joose, "Becoming a God: Max Weber and the Social Construction of Charisma" (7a)

Note also the articles on "Charisma" and "Leadership" in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*  
(available online via search on the library homepage)

### **III. Jesus of Nazareth in History and Tradition - Sept. 7 – Oct. 5**

Setting the Stage: History, Religion and Society - Sept. 7

Fredriksen, pp. 42-73

Murphy, "Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Sanhedrin" (#8)

Murphy, "Roman Rule" (#9)

Optional: Cotter, "Miracle Stories..." (#10)

Talbert, "Miraculous Conceptions and Births..." (#11)

The Traditional Gospel Account(s) - Sept. 9-14

Gospel of Mark (read all)

See Oaks #12 for parallel gospel episodes (on baptism, note discussion of Crossan, pp. 33-48 and  
Fredriksen, pp. 184-189). For Passion narratives, see Oaks #12a and online site.

Fredriksen, chapter 2 (on synoptic gospels and John) and pp. 220-270 on passion narratives  
(compare Crossan, pp. 123-192)

Brown, "Jesus the Messiah" (#13)

Fredriksen, pp. 119-154, 214-218 (on messiah and eschatological climate)

Optional: See Oaks #12b for other gospel texts discussed in Crossan (Thomas, Peter, etc.)

The Modern Quest, its Crumbling Criteria, and the Memory Turn - Sept. 16

Theissen/Merz, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus" (#14)

Meier, "How Do We Decide What Comes from Jesus?" (#15)

Meier, "Josephus" and "Other Pagan and Jewish Writings" (#16)

Keith, "Jesus Tradition, Memory, and What Really Happened" (#17)

Kloppenborg, "Memory, Performance, and the Sayings of Jesus" (#18)

Optional: Crossley, "Toward a Secular Approach to Christian Origins" (#19)

Jesus the Jew, the Law, and Identity Scholarship - Sept. 21-23

Bible: Mark 1:44

Matthew 5:17-48

Matthew 15:1-20//Mark 7:1-23

Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6

Mark 2:23-28/Matthew 12:1-8/Luke 6:1-5

Matthew, chap. 23 (for this chapter and Matthew in general, see Saldarini below)

Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict" - #20 (applies sociological  
model of deviance to community behind the gospel)

Crossley, "Peasant Unrest and the Emergence of Jesus' Specific View of the Law" (Oaks #21)  
Arnal, "A Manufactured Controversy: Why the Jewish Jesus is a Red Herring" and "The Jewish Jesus and Contemporary Identity" (#22 and #23)  
Crossley, "A 'Very Jewish' Jesus: Perpetuating the Myth of Superiority" (#24)

The Historical Jesus *du jour* - Sept. 28 - Oct. 5

Vermes, "Beneath the Gospels: The Real Jesus" (#25)  
Schüssler Fiorenza, "In Search of the 'Real' Jesus: The Social-Scientific Quest" (#26)  
Horsley, "Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine" (#27)  
Gager, "The End of Time and the Rise of Community" (#28)  
Malina, "Was Jesus a Charismatic Leader?" (#29)  
Piovanelli, "Jesus' Charismatic Authority: On the Historical Applicability of a Sociological Model" (#30)  
McCulloch, "Jesus, Christ, and the Mythology of Charisma" available online via the college library (= chapter two of his book, *Charisma and Patronage: A Dialogue with Max Weber*) - #31

Optional: Stegemann/Stegemann, "Jesus' Followers in the Land of Israel in New Testament Times" - #32 (covers interpretive models with emphasis on charisma beyond Weber)

\*\*\**First Short Paper Due - September 28*\*\*\*

#### **IV. Muhammad in History and Tradition - Oct. 7 – Nov. 4**

Setting the Stage - Oct. 7

Donner, 1-38  
Hawting, "Religion in the *jahiliyya*: Theories and Evidence" (#33)

Optional: Crone, "The Rise of Islam" (#34)  
Hoyland, "Religion" (#35)

The Traditional Life of Muhammad and Later Traditions - Oct. 12

Selections from non-Quranic sources (commentators, Hadiths, Ibn Ishaq, al-Tabari, etc. (#36)  
Donner, pp. 39-89  
Horowitz, "The Growth of the Muhammad Legend" (#37)  
Schimmel, "Muhammad the Beautiful Model" and "Legends and Miracles" (#38)

\*\**Take-home Midterm Essays Due - October 23*\*\*

The Quest for the Historical Muhammad, Traditional and Otherwise - Oct. 14, 21 (No class Oct. 19)

Hoyland, "Writing the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad: Problems and Solutions" (39)  
Rubin, "The Prophet Muhammad and the Islamic Sources" (#40)  
Crone, "What Do We Know about Muhammad?" (#41)

Rippin, "Muhammad in the Qur'ān: Reading Scripture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" (#42)

Rubin, "The Chronology of Muhammad's Life" (#43)

Hoyland, "The Earliest Christian Writings on Muhammad: An Appraisal" (#44)

Optional: Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community" (#45)

Muhammad, Quranic Authority, and the Evolving Tradition - Oct. 26-28

Shoemaker, "Muhammad and the Qur'an" (#46)

Rubin, "Muhammad's Message in Mecca: Warnings, Signs, Miracles" (#47)

Rubin, "Isolation: The Satanic Verses" (#48)

Hawting, "The Daughters of God" (#49)

Donner, pp. 90-144 (on expansion of community after death of Muhammad)

Dabashi, "Muhammad's Charismatic Authority" (#50)

Optional: Brockopp, "Theorizing Charismatic Authority in Early Islamic Law" (#51)

Early Islam as an Apocalyptic Movement and Revisionist Sacred Geography - Nov. 2

Shoemaker, "The Beginnings of Islam and the End of Days: Muhammad as Eschatological

Prophet" (#52) and "From Believers to Muslims, from Jerusalem to the Hijāz" (#53)

The Historical Jesus and Muhammad in Comparative Mode - Nov. 4

Berg and Rollins, "The Historical Muhammad and the Historical Jesus: a Comparison of Scholarly Reinventions and Reinterpretations" (#54)

Shoemaker, "Jesus and Muhammad, the Apostle and the Apostles" (#55)

*\*\*\*Second Short Paper Due - November 4\*\*\**

## **V. The Buddha in Mythology, History, and Tradition - Nov. 9 – Dec. 2**

Setting the Stage - Nov. 9

Strong, "Introduction"

Prebish and Keown, "Background to Buddhism" (#56)

Lopez, "The Universe" (#57)

The Received Tradition According to Asvaghosa - Nov. 11-16

Oleville, pp. 4-415 (we will focus on specific cantos/episodes)

Selection of texts on the life of the Buddha (#58)

Oleville, "Introduction"

Strong, chaps. 2-3 and 6

The Same Story Told Again and Again: Buddhas, Past, Present, and Future - Nov. 18

Strong, pp. 15-34

Sadakata, "The Cosmos and Time" and "Buddhist Deities" (#59)

Wither the Historical Buddha? - Nov. 30

Penner, "Part II" and "The Quest for the Historical Buddha" (#60-61)

Cohen, "Shakyamuni: Buddhism's Founder in Ten Acts" (#62)

Saving Weberian Face - Dec. 2

McClymond, "Prophet or Loss? Reassessing Max Weber's Theory of Religion" (#63)

Responses to McClymond (#64)

Summing up (awaiting revelation) - Dec. 7