The following syllabus is the teaching and learning guide for the last time this course was taught. It will give you a good idea of the descriptions of the course, how it was taught, the reading, the papers and other assignments, the intended outcomes, and the workload. By examining this syllabus and others, you will be able to form an impression of what graduate theological education at Phillips Theological Seminary requires of students.

Due to periodic curriculum revisions, course names and/or numbers may be different on this syllabus than what the name and/or number of the current offered course may be.

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DMIN 808.02: The Biblical Message and the Praxis of God (PLRV)
Theme for 2014: Developing a Biblical Theology for a Christian Ethos

Dennis E. Smith
LaDonna Kramer Meinders Professor of New Testament

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

Students in this foundational course in biblical studies will explore biblical paradigms that define a theological approach to the practice of ministry specific to this specialization. The focus will be on texts in Paul and the Gospels which witness to the early phases of Christian community formation and provide a paradigm for reimagining the process of Christian community and identity formation today. Identity formation will be especially explored through the concept of *ethos*, which refers to the guiding beliefs and moral foundation of an individual and/or group. *Ethos* can then be seen as a component of Christian vocation.

The subject matter for this course is based on my own research undertaken over the last several years. Consequently, a majority of the readings for the course are my own writings which I hope eventually to put together into a book or two.

TEXTBOOKS AND OTHER REQUIRED READINGS:

NOTE: Items 1 & 2 will need to be purchased. All others are posted at the Moodle site for the course.


**COURSE RATIONALE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:**

1) **The House Church.** A central focus of this course will be to examine the house church as the locus for early Christian community and identity formation. The nature of the house church as social environment is reviewed in item 3 above. Also foundational are items 5 and 10 above.

2) **We will look at three moments in the early history of Christianity:**

   a) **The preaching of Jesus (ca. 30-33 CE).** Presuppositions for historical Jesus study in this course include the following:
1. Although Jesus was a teacher with a profound message, he did not himself found a community. Rather he was a theological reformer located solidly within the Jewish tradition, somewhat like a prophet/rabbi in social location, although he was also likely of a lower class, perhaps a peasant.

2. We have four canonical Gospels but only one Jesus. We cannot read the Gospels as historical accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus, especially since they disagree on important details. We therefore must extrapolate from our evidence what might constitute the most probable historical data about Jesus. In this course, we recommend the Jesus Seminar publications as a starting point.

3. The parables as a group constitute our most solid evidence for the content of Jesus’ preaching. We will use Brandon Scott’s book, Re-Imagine the World (item 2 above), as our primary guide to the message of the parables.

b) The communities of Paul (late 40’s & 50’s CE). Presuppositions for the study of Paul include the following:

1. Paul is our earliest witness for the formation of Gentile communities of Jesus followers. He considered all of these communities to be located within the larger institutional world of Judaism; that is, they were Jewish sects. He never met Jesus and so did not base his theology on the teachings of Jesus; rather he based it on the paradigm of “Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23).

2. We will use the seven undisputed letters of Paul as the basis for our study. These are (in approximate chronological order, all written in the 50’s): 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, and Romans.

3. Paul became a legendary missionary figure in Christian lore long before his writings came to be widely known. The history of the interpretation of Paul in early Christianity is found in (in approximate chronological order, from the 80’s to ca. 125): 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, Acts of the Apostles, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus. These writings are not useful for reconstructing the historical Paul, but rather are useful for tracing the influence and reinterpretation of Paul in early Christianity.
4. As our guide to the communities of Paul, we will use items 4, 6, 7, and 9 above.

c) The community of the Gospel of Mark (ca. early 70’s CE). Presuppositions for the study of the Gospel of Mark include the following:

1. Mark was the first narrative gospel to be written. Prior to Mark there had been collections of sayings of Jesus (e.g. “Q”), but no established narrative. After Mark was written, the narrative he created became the standard outline for the life of Jesus for all subsequent Gospels, including Matthew, Luke, and John.

2. Mark was written soon after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, which took place in 70 CE. His acquaintance with that event can be seen in Mark 13:1-2. We do not know who wrote Mark; as is the case with the other Gospels, the author is anonymous.

3. Mark was not written for posterity but rather to address a particular community facing a particular set of circumstances. In that sense it is a sermon for that community. Since it is a narrative about Jesus, rather than a letter ala Paul, it’s data about early Christian identity formation is embedded in the story. Our resources for analyzing Mark on this issue are “The House Church and the Poor According to the Gospel of Mark” (item 8 above) and “The Banquet in the Gospels,” pp 219-77, esp. 240-53, in From Symposium to Eucharist (item 1 above).

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Three short papers (due in class in January).
   - Prepare a brief profile of the Christian ethos that is developed or implied in each of the moments addressed in the assigned readings.
     a) Paper one: The Historical Jesus. Write a 5-8 page profile of the presumed ethos for a follower of Jesus as indicated in the parables.
     b) Paper Two: The Pauline Communities. Write a 5-8 page profile of the presumed ethos Paul was trying to develop for members of a Pauline community.
c) Paper Three: The Markan Community. Write a 5-8 page profile of the presumed ethos for a member of the Markan Community as implied in the Gospel of Mark.

- These papers will be due when the class meets in January. Please bring copies of your papers to give to all class members (5 currently enrolled) for class discussion.


- Write a 15 - 20 page paper in which you develop a Biblical theology for the Christian vocation today based on the exegetical studies in this class.
- This should be a formal research paper with footnotes and bibliography, following the guidelines in the PTS Style Guide (posted online at the library site).

**COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY**

a) Historical Jesus Studies:
b) Pauline Studies:

c. Gospel of Mark: