

**De/Colonizing Jesus: New Testament Christologies Against the Backdrop of the
Roman Empire**
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Purpose

Drawing on recent scholarship applying post-colonial studies to the interpretation of biblical texts, this course will approach New Testament understandings of Jesus, his mission, and the communal identities that arose around his memory to relate indigenous experiences, identities, and histories to the questions of empire, domination, and resistance. The oddly expressed “de/colonizing” in the course title expresses an overarching aim of the course to attend to ways in which biblical christologies themselves have been depoliticized (i.e. *colonized*) in the history of Christian interpretation by hiding or reconfiguring their politics so as to make them more conducive to the practices of empire and colonization. The course will attend to the contemporary liberationist hermeneutical task of recovering those political dimensions so as to *decolonize* New Testament texts and to explore their importance for faithful contemporary witness and a theology of retrieval for the sake of nurturing indigenous identities in the contemporary world. At its most general level the course intends to deepen understanding of various Christologies as they are found in the New Testament and related literature from the first and second centuries, and their background in Hebrew Bible, Inter-testamental, and Hellenistic Literature, especially as they relate to the political context of the Roman Empire and the imperial cult of the divine emperor. More particularly, however, exegetical focus will be on the political dimensions of New Testament christologies as they relate to life in the Roman Empire and second on the narrative dimensions of New Testament christologies as a means of engaging the epic narratives of Roman imperial propaganda. The course will increase students' awareness of the social, cultural and historical forces that contributed to the formation of early Christian Christology, and how early Christian christologies can be used as a resource for engaging contemporary societal challenges and political ideologies of domination and colonization. Where appropriate, reference will be given to the history of interpretation of select passages in the early Christian debates of the first 5 centuries and how texts were used to support various christological positions, and the ways in which Christology was both colonized and again decolonized as Christianity moved from the margins of imperial society to its centre.

Competence Objectives

1. A developing awareness of the contemporary exegetical debate concerning the validity of the motif of “Empire” in the interpretation of NT texts.
2. Through class engagement and conversation to deepen the ability to engage the student’s own indigenous social context with the material being taught.

3. Facility in the use of post-colonial study in the interpretation of early Christian texts and in the analysis of lived indigenous realities as a means of decolonization and the recovery/construction of first cultures' voices.
4. An ability to identify and discuss critically the main contours of the imperial cults of the emperor and their possible influences on the shape and content of early Christian literature and culture.
5. An ability to relate an ancient Christian text from the first two centuries to issues relevant to contemporary indigenous realities.
6. An ability to reflect theologically on biblical texts and their contemporary relevance for teaching and proclamation in the students' own contexts.

Format

One 3-hour morning class daily and an afternoon 3-hour tutorial daily to take up issues discussed in the morning class.

Content

1. Introduction to key concepts in post-colonial theory and why they matter in the task of decolonization.
2. The historical Jesus's parables as strategies for decolonization in occupied Roman Palestine.
3. The miracles and pronouncement stories of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels as strategies of decolonization in Jesus communities of the first century
4. The adoption of imperial language and its inversion in the Pauline corpus
5. The Book of Revelation as postcolonial discourse

Evaluation

***If you don't bring your Bible, do not come to class! It is preferable that students bring a printed version of the Bible (King James Version or paraphrases [The Message] are not to be used).**

It is assumed that students will come prepared for study and discussion. As a consequence hence use social media (email, Facebook, texting, etc. during lectures) is strictly forbidden. If students need to have access to social media in order to engage family or other necessary matters they must indicate this.

For M.Div, Students:

For Continuing Education/ Certificate Credit:

A 1-2 page single-spaced journal on each day's morning lecture that describes the main points of the lecture and draws connection with the student's own life and ministry, due at the start of the following class.

For M.Div Credit:

A 3750-5000 word/15-20 page paper (double spaced, 12 pt font) on a New Testament text, metaphor, topic or theme discussed in the lectures that engages the following:

- a. the social context of the New Testament data in its imperial setting and how it relates to the Roman Empire and the New Testament writing
- b. an application of at least one of the key terms/concepts introduced in the class from the field of postcolonial studies in the analysis of the text and its meaning in contemporary indigenous contexts
- c. a reflection on the connection between the New Testament topic and the student's own life and ministry in his or her social context.

Research Depth: 10 academic /scholarly entries beyond course texts for final paper as applicable, to be included in a bibliography presented in proper form at the end of the paper.

Bibliographical and citation style must conform to an academic styleguide of the student's choice. At the top of the bibliography on the paper the style will be named. Bibliographies that do not conform to the ecognized format chosen will be returned for correction.

Deadlines: Monday 15 October for the paper

Class Attendance: Students are required to attend all lectures. For M.Div. students, in the case of absence, there will be recording of the lecture which the student will be expected to listen to and summarize in two single-spaced pages due the following class.

Required Texts

A Bible, preferably a study edition, translation of choice, but no paraphrases and no pocket-sized versions and no KJV.

Adam Winn, ed., *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016). ISBN 978-1628371338.

Recommended

Marie Battiste, ed., *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (Vancouver: UBC Press. 2000) ISBN 978-0774807463

John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome with God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper/San Francisco 2005) .ISBN 978-0060816162

Richard Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002). ISBN 978-0800634902

Christopher Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and His First Followers* (Louisville: John Knox Westminster, 2001). ISBN 978-0664224318

Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990). ISBN 978-0472081240