

# The Historical Jesus

Arts and Sciences 138.\_\_\_\_

Autumn, 2008 1 Credit Hour (S/U)

Time and Place: Thursday, 4-4:50, Hagerty Rm. 50

Instructor: Professor Daniel T. Reff  
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Office Hours: T & TH: 2:30-4pm (or by appointment): Office: 430 Hagerty Hall

## COURSE DESCRIPTION:

As a discipline, Comparative Studies focuses in part on the “stories” we tell ourselves -- stories about everything from who God is, to what a man or woman is, to what it means to be happy or French -- and how these stories influence, and are influenced by our lives as lived. One of the most influential stories told during the past two millennia (just think of Western history) is the story of Jesus [the] Christ. Whether Jesus was God is a matter of faith (as Jesus himself noted); it is not something that can seemingly be proved or disproved. In this class we will not focus on matters of faith. We will instead focus on the “historical Jesus” -- the Jesus who emerges from the gospels when they are read along with contemporary sources from the perspective of historical anthropology. The course is imagined as ten , focused and informed, yet relaxed, hour-long conversations (the point is to have fun exchanging and exploring ideas). The conversations will focus mostly on the substantive argument and critical methods used by Dominic Crossan in his acclaimed (and enjoyable!) book, **Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography**. A professor of biblical studies, Crossan draws from history, anthropology, religion, literature, among other disciplines.

## REQUIRED TEXT:

**Jesus A Revolutionary Biography** (1995), by John Dominic Crossan. San Francisco: HarperCollins Paperback Edition

## OTHER READING (made available through *Carmen*):

Chapter 1 (“Disease and the Rise of Christianity in Europe, 150-800 C.E,” pp. 35-121) from **Plagues, Priests, and Demons** (2005), by Daniel T. Reff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## COURSE POLICIES, EVALUATION & GRADING:

Students are expected to attend every class; we will only meet ten times for about an hour. You are not only expected to attend class (when possible, let me know in advance if you can’t make a class), but you are expected to do the assigned reading and come prepared to class to discuss issues posed in class and raised by the readings. The course has no writing assignments *per se*, however, as discussed below, each student is required to help facilitate one class discussion, which requires drafting an outline of critical issues for discussion that will be distributed to the class. Because the focus of our discussions (Jesus) is potentially divisive, tolerance, respect, and a sense of humor are required of all.

This class is S/U graded (you either pass or fail). Students will be evaluated on the basis of class participation (80%), which presupposes regular attendance (you can’t miss more than one class), and one discussion facilitation (20%), which will entail helping direct class discussion of major issues raised by a particular weekly reading assignment. Prior to class, discussion facilitators will prepare a handout of questions for the group to pursue as a whole. Each student will receive a grade for their discussion facilitation. For all work you do in this course, the Code of Student Conduct of the Ohio State University is in effect (it is fine to embrace other peoples’ ideas and work with others, but acknowledge when you do so!).

Note: If you feel you need accommodation based on the impact of a disability please contact me to discuss your needs. I rely on the Office for Disability Services (614-292-3307; 150 Pomerene Hall) to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students. If you have not previously contacted the ODS I encourage you to do so.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNED READING

Note: With the exceptions of Weeks 9 & 10, all the reading indicated below is from Dominick Crossan's book, **Jesus a Revolutionary Biography**

Week 1    *Topic:* Introductions  
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Week 2    *Topic:* The Birth of Jesus and the Augustan Age  
Crossan, Prologue and Chapter 1 (to page 29)

Week 3    *Topic:* Jesus, son of God, son of Man  
Crossan, Chapter 2 (pp 29-54)

Week 4    *Topic: Jesus and the Promised Kingdom*  
Crossan: Chapter 3 (pp. 54-75)

Week 5    *Topic:* Jesus and what to make of the body  
Crossan: Chapter 4 (pp. 75-102)

Week 6    *Topic: Jesus and should you be rich?*  
Crossan: Chapter 5 (pp. 102-123)

Week 7    *Topic :* Jesus and the Passion  
Crossan: Chapter 6 (pp. 123-158)

Week 8    *Topic:* What became of Jesus and his body?  
Crossan: Chapter 7 and (pp. 159-192)

Week 9    *Topic: Christianity after Jesus*  
Crossan: Epilogue (pp. 193-201)  
Reff: pp. 35-to the top of page 83 of Chapter 1 of **Plagues, Priests, and Demons** (2005),  
by Daniel T. Reff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week 10    *Topic:* The "Conversion" of Pagan Europe (3150-800 C.E.)  
Reff: pp. 83-121 of Chapter 1 from **Plagues, Priests, and Demons**.

About the Professor: Daniel Reff is a Professor of Comparative Studies with a particular interest in the comparative study of mission frontiers during the late Roman Empire as well as during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Latin America and Asia. Trained as an anthropologist and ethnohistorian (half-jokingly defined as an historian who looks at history from the perspective of the "losers" -- those who rarely get to write history), Professor Reff has written several books on the subject of Christianity, most recently: **Plagues, Priests, and Demons, Sacred Narratives and the Rise of Christianity in the Old World and the New** (Cambridge University Press, 2005).