

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**  
**UNDERSTANDING THE NEW TESTAMENT rev. 2/22/07**

**PLEASE NOTE: THE THURSDAY MORNING SECTION MEETS AT 9:30 AM TO ACCOMMODATE THE INSTRUCTOR'S SCHEDULE NEEDS**

Philosophy/Religion 121  
3 Credit Hours

**Instructor:** Jerry Johnston e-mail: [okra55@neb.rr.com](mailto:okra55@neb.rr.com) phone: 474-5225

**Catalogue Description:** An introduction to the great ideas and stories of the Bible, focusing on the New Testament. Students examine leadership in the Bible through daily assignments, short written papers, and a research project.

**Discussion:** The New Testament is the central document of the Christian Church. Easy enough. But where did it come from? Who wrote it? In what sense can it be said to be true? Is its truth the same for all? Then why so many churches? The New Testament is employed for so many different purposes by many different people – is there a way to determine who, if anyone, is right?

This course is not Sunday (or Saturday) school. It is not intended to increase or decrease anyone's faith. It is, rather, a critical and academic look at the New Testament and how it is used and has been used through the years. But since the New Testament is a book with a message and a point of view about the meaning of life and our relationship with God and each other, our study will require more than disinterested objectivity to come to a full understanding of its contents.

The course concentrates on understanding the New Testament by understanding where it came from – how it was written, who wrote it, and how it came to be one volume from many sources. Tied up in this study is a look at the early Christian Church, and the complicated beginnings of the faith.

**Required Texts:**

**New Testament** – whatever you may own will be fine, but if you're buying, I would recommend either The Jerusalem Bible or The New Revised Standard translation.

**Quarantine** – An interesting novel with a unique point of view on Jesus.

**Course Objectives**

**Students who successfully complete this course:**

- Will be able to recount major stories and themes from the New Testament.
- Will be able to recognize the significant theological and philosophical content of New Testament material.
- Will be able to make cogent and perceptive connections between New Testament material and modern issues.
- Will be able to bring an understanding of the culture of the Middle East of New Testament times to bear on their interpretation of New Testament material.
- Will have a broader understanding of belief systems other than their own.

**Here's how we can reach these goals.**

First, of course, we will **read portions of the New Testament**. We'll concentrate on selected portions of the text rather than reading the entire New Testament.

A secondary text, the book by Marcus Borg, is a wonderfully modern, fresh, and honest look at Biblical scholarship in relation to a life of faith – and it's more fun than a dry textbook. I'll supplement the text with a series of short, perhaps even fascinating, lectures.

There is no better way, I think, to connect reading and thinking than to write. So we will **keep a reflection journal** to distill and clarify our thinking on what we read.

In order to follow a narrow topic about which individual students have curiosity, we will each **write a (6-8 page) research paper**.

Most of our class time will be spent in **discussion, storytelling, and reading aloud** New Testament material, and discussion the theological and moral themes contained in the stories. We will also view ancient and modern art, and listen to music drawn from New Testament material as a way to approach the aesthetic use of NT material. We will also use some supplemental audio and visual materials to keep our discussions lively.

### **Here's how your grade will be figured:**

**Attendance and class participation. 40%** This is the biggest part of your grade because it's the best chance you have to be successful at meeting the course objectives. In a course like this where reflection, discussion, and narrative take precedence, attendance and participation are vital. Participation does not mean warming a chair. That's what attendance is. Participation means: speaking, listening, and demonstrating the effort to make connections between different types of material and different experiences including YOURS. Absence should be avoided by all means, and I know that unavoidable absences happen. Even so, your grade will be lowered one letter for two absences. You will not pass the course with three absences.

**Reflection Journal 30%** Each week you will be expected to make two entries in your journal (total 12). I will make suggestions on issues to write about, or you may choose your own. One entry per week will be done in class. An entry needs to be at least 2/3 of a notebook page, handwritten.

**Research Paper 30%** A paper on the topic of your choosing, length: 6-8 pages double spaced. The paper should reflect use of outside resources, and reflection of you position on the paper topic. I expect this paper in good form – typed, spelled, grammered, and all. This assignment is not meant as torture. It is meant to be an opportunity to develop your own curiosity about a narrow topic.

**CLASS POLICIES** Academic Integrity: The Doane College Academic Integrity Policy will be followed in this class. **Late Assignments:** Assignments are due when they are due, and will be graded down a full letter for every day late. Emergencies will be handled case-by-case. **Discussion Policy:** Much of the material we will discuss in this class covers issues about which individuals may have very strong feelings. All students will be shown respect in cases of disagreement. We will not avoid differences, but we will respect them. **Offensive language:** Language suggesting racism, sexism, or other forms of intolerance is not allowed.