

## Discussion Section Instructions Spring 2009

RLST 152 Introduction to New Testament History and Literature  
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Below are the paper/discussion topics for each section meeting. You will be required to write two papers based on the topics below. The first will be an exegetical paper on Luke, John, or Philemon, and the second will be on some form of conflict within early Christianity (Judaism and the Law, Women in the Early Church, or Christianity and Politics). The papers are due at the beginning of the relevant section meetings.

If you are not writing a paper for any given section meeting, you are required to write a brief, one paragraph response to the topic for that section. Thus you will turn in something at *every* section meeting, either a major paper or a brief response.

Please note that the following paper/discussion topics are meant to be *suggestive* for your thinking on these topics. Do not feel that you must deal with each aspect of the topic exhaustively or even in part. Your own treatment of the issues may demand that you move in somewhat different directions than the suggestions provided below.

### **Thurs. Feb. 12/Fri. Feb. 13: Exegesis of Luke 7:1-17**

In this passage from Luke's Gospel we find an account of two miraculous deeds performed by Jesus. Be sure to take note of and reflect upon the following issues in your attempt to analyze the two stories, and to connect them to one another in your interpretation. Compare Jesus' raising of the widow's son to similar miracle stories of prophets in 1 Kings 17:17-24 and 2 Kings 4:32-37. Compare the other healing story to passages about a centurion in the Acts of the Apostles. Are issues of ethnicity significant? What do these stories communicate beyond the simple performance of miracles? Do you think the author intentionally wanted his readers to make these connections? And if so, why? How might readers of Luke, if they knew both Jewish scripture and its stories of famous prophets and the following Acts of the Apostles, make sense of the miracle stories and their significance for an understanding of Jesus?

### **Thurs. Feb. 19/Fri. Feb. 20: Exegesis of John 4:7-26**

The famous meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, also called the "Woman at the Well," is full of possibilities for interpretation. In planning for your paper, consider some of the following questions. What is Jesus' trying to reveal through the imagery of water? Do either the gender or ethnicity differences between Jesus and the Samaritan woman affect the way you read this narrative? Are those differences crucial to its rhetorical effect or not? What are the main messages that John wants the reader to get from this dialogue? Are they consistent with the rest of his Gospel or not?

### **Thurs. Feb. 26/Fri. Feb. 27: Exegesis of Philemon**

Try to reconstruct the events that occasioned Paul's brief epistle to Philemon and consider the following questions: To whom is the letter addressed? (You should take note of the fact that in the Greek text, the occurrences of the second person pronouns are all singular except those in verses 3, 22, and 25.) What is the rhetorical effect of alternating the intended audience in this manner? And does this peculiarity help us to understand the purpose of the letter? What can we

learn about the social organization of this particular Christian community? How does Paul fit into its authority structures? What are the social classes of the main players (Paul, Philemon, Onesimus)? What can we learn about the social interaction of Christians from different social classes? What can we learn about Christian attitudes toward slavery?

### **Thurs. Mar. 26/Fri. Mar. 27: Judaism and the Law**

Where did early Christians stand on the issue of observing Jewish law? Were they required to keep all of it? some of it? none of it? Representative examples of attitudes toward the Law can be found in Matthew (esp. chapter 5-7), the letters of Paul (esp. Galatians and Roman), and the letter of James. What does the variety of opinions and teachings on the status of the Law suggest about the relationship between Christians and Jews in early Christianity?

### **Thurs. April 2/Fri. April 3: Women in Early Christianity**

Discuss the tension within the genuine Pauline materials concerning the role of women in Christian communities (e.g. in descriptions of individual women, such as Chloe in 1 Cor. 1:11 or Phoebe in Rom. 16:1-2, as well as general discussions of women's roles in 1 Cor. 11:2-16). Compare 1 Cor. 11:2-16 with 1 Cor. 14:33-36. Must one or the other passage be considered an interpolation? Finally, compare descriptions of women's roles in communities in the later Pauline tradition, focusing on 1 Timothy and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.

### **Thurs. April 9/ Fri. April 10: Visit to Yale Art Gallery**

### **Thurs. April 16/Fri. April 17: Christianity and Politics**

Compare the portrayal of the Roman Empire and state authority in New Testament texts, concentrating especially on: Roman 13; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Revelation; and any other early Christian texts you think are relevant. Was Christianity a politically conservative movement or a revolutionary movement? Both? Neither? What was the political relevance of Christianity, if any? If early Christians were in fact revolutionary (Jesus was, after all, executed by the Romans on a charge of political sedition), why all these statements about obeying and honoring authorities? If early Christians were in fact conservative, why were they persecuted and punished by the Roman authorities?