

FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR REAPPROVAL FORM
UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

COURSE TITLE:	<u>LOST AND FORGOTTEN MANUSCRIPTS OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY</u>		
SUBMITTED BY:	<u>James E. Goehring</u>	DATE:	

RATIONALE. Include short statement addressing how this course meets the FSEM's basic components and new student learning outcomes (see FSEM call above).

This seminar centers of the reading of early Christian primary texts that did not make it into the Bible (gospels, acts, letters, etc.). Individual classes are discussion based. Students explore a different assigned primary text each week, raising questions about its ideology, why it was rejected, and what its rejection means for our understanding of the early Christian world. The nature of the course challenges students to read and think beyond traditional ways of thinking with respect to the New Testament texts.

In addition, each student chooses a non-canonical text which they research indepently, write an 8-10 page research paper with footnotes, and report their findings in a presentation to the class. This work involves the use of different sources and includes a library session with Peter Caitlin, discussions on research and writing in class, short in-class presentations of their research progress, and two rough draft stages. In the process, students develop their bibliography and synthesize materials from various sources. The semester ends with in class presentations of their research to their fellow students.

SYLLABUS. Attach a course syllabus.

LOST AND FORGOTTEN MANUSCRIPTS
OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

First Year Seminar 100C5

Spring 201

Professor Jim Goehring

Office: Trinkle 235 Extension: 1343

Office Hours: M 1:00-2:30; W 10:30-11:30; TTh 3:30-4:30; and by appointment or chance.

Email works too, though response may not be immediate.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The media frenzy that surrounded the release of the newly discovered *Gospel of Judas* just before Easter 2006 offers entrée into the questions we will confront in this first year seminar course. From where does this gospel come? Why isn't it in the New Testament? When and why was it lost? Who wrote it? What does it teach about Jesus? How reliable is it? Why haven't I heard about it before? What does its existence mean for the understanding of the New Testament gospels? For identifying the early Christians? For the meaning of Early Christianity? You will soon discover that non-canonical (not in the New Testament) texts like the *Gospel of Judas* were very common in the early Christian centuries. Many survived through various means, and many more are known today only through fragments or references to

them made by early Christian authors. While some fit into what has come to be known as orthodoxy (correct teaching), many offer views and teachings at odds with the Christian tradition as represented in the canonical New Testament. The *Gospel of Judas* supplies a case in point. In the course of this semester, we will explore together a number of these texts, asking questions about their origin, their teachings, and their ultimate loss. We will ponder the diverse nature of early Christian belief revealed in these texts, seek to identify strategies employed in the creation of a singular Christian orthodoxy (correct belief), and ask what it all means for our understanding of early Christianity.

As part of our effort to understand and appreciate these diverse texts, you will learn to apply modern critical methods that situate them in their first to third century context. We will look beyond the simple surface story that they tell (the positivist reading of the text) to find in and through them access to their authors' world of religious belief, practice, and competition. We will in the end apply these tools to and ask similar questions of the canonical texts. In reading these texts, approach them with what Professor Patricia Cox Miller calls *imaginative sympathy*. Take the text seriously. Assume that the thought and/or practice presented carried real meaning for the author and his or her community. At the same time, establish *critical distance* from the text, raising questions about it that might not have been raised or even occurred to a member of the community that used it. You might, for example, ask about the values (e.g., gender roles) on which a particular text implicitly depends, or the conception of human nature that underlies its portrayal of events. So too you might query the text as to its understanding of divinity, press its difference from other texts, and ponder the debate that might have ensued. Might in fact a text be written as part of just such a debate? We will develop these skills by applying them to a variety of texts over the course of the semester.

Note that critical approach demands an effort to see outside and behind one's own world view. As you read the assigned texts in this course, set aside your beliefs and expectations and listen to the author of the text you are reading. Seek to understand his or her words on their own terms. Strive to identify your own preset ways of reading and/or judging such texts. Avoid the trap of "hearing what you want to hear and disregarding the rest" (Paul Simon, "The Boxer"). It is not always an easy thing to do. Be willing to think outside of the box and to ask hard questions. Challenge yourself with respect to how you want to see things. Remember that to understand the other does not necessarily mean to agree with it. It does, however, invariably broaden and deepen your own understanding.

COURSE GOALS:

General goals in this course include:

- Historical knowledge of the early Christians and their diverse textual tradition.
- Critical ability to explore and understand diverse religious perspectives.
- Appreciation for religious diversity in the ancient world, and through it appreciation for religious diversity today.
- Ability to read critically and interpret primary texts and secondary literature.
- Ability to express one's views effectively in written and oral form.
- Ability to enter into class discussion and make one's case convincingly.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of an FSEM, students will

- utilize a variety of research techniques to retrieve information efficiently, evaluate retrieved information, and synthesize information effectively to support their messages or arguments;
- improve development and organization of written arguments;
- demonstrate the ability to edit and revise in the writing process;
- apply the basic theories and principles of oral communication; and
- communicate effectively in a variety of settings, including public speaking and group discussion.

ASSIGNED TEXTS:

Required to buy:

Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Recommended:

It is useful in this course to have a bible to use and consult both during and outside of class. Many of the texts we read will assume various biblical stories or build from them. If you do not have a bible, I recommend *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (New Revised Standard Version). I would steer clear of a bible with the King James Version of the text, as it is dated. **If you use the internet for your bible, please print out the assigned readings to bring to class or bring a computer device on which you can read them.**

Additional Texts:

May be assigned in class and made available on-line or on reserve in Simpson Library.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

This seminar is based on the reading of primary texts, which will serve as the basis for class discussion and debate. We will work together as a class to make critical sense of the diversity evident in the texts and to explain its eventual loss with the rise of orthodoxy. As such, class participation and discussion are an essential component of the learning process and grade. Reading and writing assignments must be completed prior to the class period for which they have been assigned. **A willingness to enter into class discussion and debate is expected.** Class participation accounts for a major portion of your final grade (60 out of 200 points). **Note that attendance alone is not considered class participation.** Get involved and make the seminar fun. A series of nine “Observation and Question” assignments will occur throughout the semester. They are meant to engage you in the reading assignments in preparation for discussion. You will be expected to type out your observation and question drawn from the assigned readings and hand them in at the end of the class period for which they were assigned. Each paper is worth 5 points, and only the top eight grades will count. This means that you can forgo one, or drop the lowest score. Note that late papers will not be accepted without a prior excuse. Each paper should be between one and two pages in length. Note that these papers do not require research beyond a careful reading of the assigned primary text.

Your major paper assignment involves writing a research paper on a text of your choice that is relevant to the class **and cleared with me.** The final paper must be type-written, double spaced, and 8-10 pages in length, including notes. The Religion Program requires the Chicago Manual of Style format. I will expect you to use it for your footnotes. You can find information on it on the Simpson Library webpage or through the Writing Center. I too can help you with notes in this regard. The final paper takes the place of a final exam and will be worth 80 points. **Your Research Paper is due on the last day of class.** This paper requires library research, which you will be introduced to this semester. Internet sources, other than those that are simply digital versions of printed texts, must be used with caution and sparingly. We will address this in class. Various elements of your paper, including a topic statement and developing bibliographies will be due at various points in the semester.

We will talk about the nature of your papers as the semester unfolds. Topics may explore a particular text, a topic, a theory, etc. There are many texts in *Lost Christianities* that we will not discuss in class. You may choose from those, use one we’ve talked about in class, find another, or explore a particular topic that intrigues you. Topics must be cleared with me. **I encourage you to use me as a resource early and often. I am available in my set office hours or through arrangement. I live close to campus, so do not hesitate to set up an appointment if my office hours do not work for you. I assume you are all adults and will reach out for advice and help as needed.**

Papers must be turned in on the assigned date in class. Late papers will not be accepted without prior approval. **Mark the due dates on your calendars.**

Class Participation.....	60 points
Question and Discussion assignments (8 at 5 points each).....	40 points
Final Research Paper.....	80 points
Text Selection and Initial Bibliography.....	5 points
Introduction and Annotated Bibliography.....	10 points
Rough Draft.....	15 points
Final Paper.....	50 points
Class-presentation.....	20 points
Total	200 points

Note that there are no exams in this class. That is the bonus for all of the writing assignments and the emphasis on class discussion. Make the most of the opportunities for discussion. If you consider yourself an introvert (I think of myself as such), push yourself to get involved. There are no silly questions, and anything is game for discussion. A mid-semester progress report of satisfactory requires a course average of C- or above. A passing grade requires a full D; there is no D- at UMW.

SYLLABUS:

WEEK 1

Jan 14 Course Introduction and Research Paper Assignment

Jan 16 Creating Tradition – What Came First?

QEP Assignment: What do you hope to learn in this seminar?

Today we will explore through discussion the nature of the Christian tradition and its origin. Where does it come from, and how do its particular beliefs form? Note that talking about religion is always tricky as people come with different forms of belief. Be ready to explore alternative possibilities; learn to think outside of the box, to read and think against the grain.

I strongly encourage interruptions, questions, and discussion. We learn best by engaging the subject and asking questions. In this class period, I will explore with you the earliest stages of Christian history from Jesus to Paul to the writers of our primary sources (gospels, acts, revelations, etc.).

Read: *Lost Christianities*, pgs ix-xv and 1-11. Continue looking and reading through the contents of *Lost Scriptures*. Be thinking about your text choice for your research paper.

Assignment: In preparation for our discussion on Thursday, carefully consider the fact of the New Testament with its collection of 27 books and the list of major apocryphal texts found in *Lost Christianities* ix-xi (and in *Lost Scriptures*). Why did the 27 make it into the New Testament while the others did not? What might have been the reasons? What does the fact of this selection process say about the nature of early Christianity?

WEEK 2

Jan 21 Early Christian Diversity

This week we will explore together the diversity of the early Christian world through Paul's letter to the Galatians. Food for thought: What does it mean to read a text against the grain? What role does the author and his/her particular situation play in the telling of the story?

Read: *Lost Scriptures*, 1-5; Galatians (focus particularly on chapters 1-2). If you do not have a bible, you can read them at the following internet site: <http://www.devotions.net/bible/00new.htm>

Assignment: The goal for today is to discover what we can from Paul's letter to his Galatian community about the situation in Galatia. Read the assigned text slowly and carefully. It is helpful to read it more than once. Reflect on what is happening in Paul's community. Why is he writing this letter and to what is he responding? What is the "other gospel" that he mentions (1:7)? Try to figure it out; raise questions. What might those who he is railing against have said in response? Does this evidence change your understanding of earliest Christianity? If so, how? If not, why not?

Question and Discussion 1: Bring a question and its discussion (1-2 pages in length) drawn from your reading of Galatians to class. You might consider the questions presented under the assignment above, though you are certainly not limited to them. Place your question at the top of the page and use your subsequent “essay” to explore it. Be prepared to present your question to the class for discussion.

Jan 23 The Gospel of Peter

This week we begin our exploration of various non-canonical gospels, letters, and acts. We will start with a gospel that was buried with an early Christian in Upper Egypt, the *Gospel of Philip*. We will begin with a more general review of the discovery and evidence, and continue on with a more in depth reading of the gospel itself. Use our joint efforts on these texts to develop ideas and methods for approaching the text you select for your research project.

Read: *Lost Christianities*, ch. 1 (pp. 13-28) and *Lost Scripture*, pp. 31-37 (*Gospel of Peter*). Focus on the chapter in *Lost Christianities*.

Assignment: As you read the chapter in *Lost Christianities*, consider the implications of the evidence Ehrman supplies. Where did the text come from? Who wrote it? What does the idea of forgery mean in the ancient world, and how do we determine which texts are forgeries? How did they decide this question in antiquity?

Question and Discussion 2: Bring a question and its discussion (1-2 pages in length) that interests you drawn from Ehrman’s chapter. You may focus your question on anything that interests you from the reading. Place your question at the top of the page and use your subsequent “essay” to explore it. Be prepared to present your question to the class for discussion.

WEEK 3

Jan 28 Library Class with Peter Catlin, Reference Librarian

This is an important meeting to acquaint you with the library’s resources in this field and how to get information for your research paper. Attendance is mandatory. Meet in Simpson Library Room 225 (Right near the elevator on the 2nd floor).

Jan 30 The Gospel of Peter

Today we will focus in depth on the *Gospel of Peter* itself and its relationship to the canonical tradition.

Read: *Gospel of Peter* (*Lost Scriptures*, 31-37). Read also the canonical versions in Mk.16; Mt 28; Lk 24:1-11; Jn 20. Read the latter in the order I list them as that is the order of their composition.

Assignment: Be prepared to discuss the evidence from the *Gospel of Peter*. Consider how it compares with the empty tomb stories in the canonical gospels. Do you see any sign of development in the story over time?

Question and Discussion 3: Bring a question and its discussion (1-2 pages in length) drawn from the readings, and be prepared to present your question to the class for discussion. Reflect on the relationship of the account of the empty tomb in the *Gospel of Peter* with those in the canonical gospels.

EXTRA CREDIT POSSIBILITY: See end of syllabus

WEEK 4

Feb 4 DUE: TEXT SELECTION AND INITIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

You will have selected your text and begun your research by this time. Using the tools learned in the library session, I expect you to develop a bibliography that will ultimately include eight sources beyond the text itself. These sources must be documentable. Internet sources that have no named author are unacceptable. Use Simpson Library, and ask the reference librarian for help when needed.

Assignment: Come prepared to tell the class about your topic.

DUE: Topic paper (1-2 pages) plus initial bibliography. It should include a minimum of three items beyond the required texts for this course, one of which is annotated and two of which are non-internet sources (like Wikipedia).

Feb 6 Acts of Paul and Thecla

Today and next week we will turn to one of a number of non-canonical acts that survive from early Christianity. Many of these function as popular tales for early Christian readers, alternatives to Greco-Roman novels and texts. We will focus on an intriguing text about the woman Thecla, who followed Paul.

Read: *Lost Christianities*, ch. 2 (pp. 29-46) and *Lost Scriptures*, 113-21. Focus primarily on the chapter from *Lost Christianities*.

Assignment: As with chapter 1, consider the implications of the evidence that Ehrman supplies. What do you make of the fact that Tertullian exposed the deacon who forged the document? Why did he do it? Where did he get his information? What were the results of his exposure as the forger on the text's subsequent use? How might you explain its continued use?

WEEK 5

Feb 11 Acts of Paul and Thecla continued

Read: *Acts of Paul and Thecla (Lost Scriptures, 113-21)*

Assignment: Read the text slowly and carefully. Multiple readings of the same text help you both in understanding its flow and focusing your questions. Consider the basic plot line and how the text uses the story to instruct its readers. What does the author hope to teach his readers? How does Thecla come off in the story? How about Paul? What are the important ethical issues as he sees them? How do gender, family, and authority fit into the picture?

Question and Discussion 4: Bring a question and its discussion (1-2 pages in length) drawn from your reading of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, and be prepared to present your question to the class for discussion.

Feb 13 Acts of Paul and Thecla continued

Today we will consider the role of women in the early church by comparing a canonical and non-canonical text.

Read: 1 Timothy 1-6; compare it with the *Acts of Thecla*.

Assignment: Compare and contrast the role of women in 1 Timothy with Thecla's role in the *Acts of Thecla*. How do they differ? Why would they differ? Does the difference tell us anything about the role of women in the respective authors' communities? What role do the texts play in shaping the role of women in the early (and subsequent) Christian church?

Question and Discussion 5: Bring a question and its discussion (1-2 pages) on the differing roles of women in the early church drawn from the readings, and be prepared to present your question to the class for discussion.

WEEK 6

Feb 18 Research Paper Discussion: Format, Style, Notes, and other questions.

You should be continuing to make progress on your research paper. Today we will discuss issues of method, format, style, footnotes, and other questions you might have.

Assignment: Come with questions!

DUE: YOU WILL TURN IN AN INTRODUCTION TO YOUR TEXT (2-3 PAGES) AND AN EXPANDED BIBLIOGRAPHY (MINIMUM OF 5 SOURCES, THREE OF WHICH ARE TO BE ANNOTATED).

Feb 20 The Coptic Gospel of Thomas

Today and next week we will explore one of the most important non-canonical gospels to surface from late antiquity. Composed in the second century, it remained unknown until the discovery of a complete copy in Upper Egypt in 1945. The copy, a translation of the original in Coptic, was produced circa 400 C.E.

Read: *Lost Christianities*, ch. 3 (pp. 47-65).

Assignment: Reflect over the information found in Ehrman's account of the discovery and the text. The Nag Hammadi discovery, from which the *Gospel of Thomas* derives, added many early Christian texts to those that we knew (52 total texts, of which 6 are duplicates and 6 others were previously known = 40 texts that we had never seen before). Consider the impact of such new material on a field of study. How does it change things? How does one factor new texts into the mix of what was already known and studied? How does Ehrman describe the *Gospel of Thomas*? How does it compare with the canonical gospels? How does it alter your notion or definition of a gospel?

WEEK 7

Feb 25 The Gospel of Thomas continued

Read: The *Gospel of Thomas* (*Lost Scriptures*, 19-28).

Assignment: As you carefully read through the text, consider its contents in light of saying 1, "Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death." How does rest of the gospel fit with this opening? How does one find the interpretation that offers salvation? How does this gospel's notion of salvation compare with what became the traditional teaching of Christianity? What does it mean for our understanding of the early Christian understanding of Jesus and the salvation he offered? What is missing?

Question and Discussion 6: Bring a question and its discussion (1-2 pages), and be prepared to present your question to the class for discussion. Your observation and question should focus on the broader questions of the nature of the gospel rather than on individual sayings.

Feb 27 Research Paper Reports

Prepare a brief 5 minute report on your research topic for class. You should by this time have a clear knowledge of the manuscript tradition for your text, its contents, and an idea of your focus and thesis.

WEEK 8

Mar 4-6 *****SPRING BREAK*****

WEEK 9

Mar 11 The Debate over Resurrection

Early Christians debated the nature of the resurrection from the very beginning after Jesus' death. Consider your own understanding of the notion of what survives after a person's death, if anything. We will be looking at texts that offer various answers to this question.

Read: 1 Corinthians 15

Assignment: Consider the various sides of the debate going on in Paul's Corinthian community. Can you reconstruct the sides of the debate? What would those Jesus followers whom Paul is arguing against have believed about Jesus' resurrection and their own future resurrection?

Question and Discussion 7: Bring a question and its discussion (1-2 pages) drawn from your reading of 1 Corinthians 15 to class and be prepared to present your question to the class for discussion. Focus your reflection on the nature of the resurrection.

Mar 13 Resurrection continued

We will explore today a text that turned up in Egypt as part of a collection of thirteen books containing lost early Christian texts. It addresses many of the same issues that Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 15.

Read: *Treatise on the Resurrection (Lost Scriptures, pp. 207-120).*

Assignment: Read the text slowly and carefully. Reread it. See if you can follow its logic and make sense of its idea of resurrection. How does it fit into the picture you derived from reading 1 Corinthians 15?

Question and Discussion 8: Bring a question and its discussion (1-2 pages) drawn from your reading of the *Treatise on the Resurrection* to class and be prepared to present your question to the class for discussion. Focus your reflection on the nature of the resurrection.

WEEK 10

Mar 18 Resurrection continued and Research Paper Questions

We will have an open discussion about the nature of the debate over resurrection and what it means for the understanding of the early Christians. Come prepared to enter into the debate. Consider what it means for the understanding of Jesus' role in salvation.

We will also use this period to work further on research paper questions. This is a good time to bring in questions about theses, notes, etc.

Mar 20 Gnosticism: An Introduction

I will briefly discuss the general pattern of belief that frames various so-called Gnostic forms of Christianity in the early centuries. Many texts in your *Lost Scriptures* volume derive from such groups.

Assignment: Come prepared to listen and take notes. Consider, as you listen, how various of the ideas we have met this semester might fit into such a system of belief.

WEEK 11

Mar 25 Gospel of Judas

Read: *Gospel of Judas*. Print out the PDF version of the National Geographic translation available at http://www.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/_pdf/GospelofJudas.pdf. Bring it to class for discussion.

Assignment: Read the text carefully. It is fragmentary and thus difficult to follow at places. Assume the ideology of the *Secret Book of John* as the background. How are the disciples understood in this text? What role does Judas play? What questions does it raise about the treatment of the disciples in the various other sources, both non-canonical and canonical?

Question and Discussion 9: Bring a question and its discussion (1-2 pages), drawn from your reading of the *Gospel of Judas* and be prepared to present your question to the class for discussion.

DUE: RESEARCH PAPER ROUGH DRAFT PAGES DUE (5-6 PAGES). INCLUDE FOOTNOTES.

Mar 27 Student Presentations

WEEK 12

Apr 1 Student Presentations

Apr 3 Student Presentations

WEEK 13

Apr 8 Student Presentations

Apr 10 Student Presentations

WEEK 14

Apr 15 Student Presentations

Apr 17 Student Presentations

WEEK 15

Apr 22 Student Presentations

Apr 24 Final Notes: What does it all mean?

QEP Assignment: What did you learn in this seminar?

DUE: RESEARCH PAPER – FINAL FORM

READING DAYS: April 26-27

FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, April 29, 8:30-11:00 *** Research Paper in lieu of final exam.

FURTHER STUDY

The PBS Frontline series “From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians” offers an excellent introduction to the early Christian world and the emergence of its literature. There are four parts: 1] A Portrait of Jesus’ World; 2] The Beginnings of the Jesus Movement; 3] The Story of the Storytellers; 3] and 4] The Emergence of the Church Why Did Christianity Succeed. They are well worth watching. Part 3, in particular, is relevant to our class. It discusses the hand of the gospel writers in the development of the traditions about Jesus.

The series is viewable online, and I encourage you to take advantage of it. Insights and questions derived from viewing the films will be happily engaged in class.

SUBMIT this form and attached syllabus electronically as one document to Dave Stahlman (wdstahlm@umw.edu). All submissions **must be in electronic form.**