The critical study of the life of Jesus
has been for theology a school of honesty.

ALBERT SCHWEITZER:
The Quest for the Historical Jesus (1906)

This imaginative challenge is with us now more than ever. How might we imagine life together in such a way that the poor are blessed, the hungry fed, the depressed filled with laughter, and the abused made safe? How might we imagine a world in which the anxieties of those who live teetering on the margins of life, never knowing whether food will come tomorrow, or clothing or shelter, might disappear in a sea of enough? Does this seem too hopelessly naive? Perhaps it is. But anyone who risks the claim that in Jesus we have come to know who God is ought at least to remember that Jesus did dream such utopian dreams.

STEPHEN J. PATTERSON:
The God of Jesus: The Historical Jesus and the Search for Meaning (1998)

My point, once again, is not that those ancient people told literal stories and we are now smart enough to take them symbolically, but that they told them symbolically and we are now dumb enough to take them literally.

JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN:
Who Is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions About the Historical Jesus (2013)
COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course provides a general introduction through the Quest of the Historical Jesus to the life and activity of the first century revolutionary prophet. Who was Jesus before he became an object of belief and worship? Why did his movement happen right there and then? What was the “good news” that turned the ancient world upside down?
We will consider the best available canonical as well as non-canonical literary and other evidences, will examine assumptions underlying the discipline (politics of interpretation), discuss methodologies and the limits of the historical investigation and also consider and evaluate several fascinating scholarly reconstructions. We will keep a heavy emphasis on the social sciences in this class, which will help us understand how Jesus himself was embedded in a specific history and culture, and how he and his counter cultural message are relevant today in a postcolonial setting.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
By the end of this course, students will be expected to be able to:
- Understand the historic and social context of the Jesus movement.
- Identify distinctive features of the primary sources on the historical figure of Jesus.
- Read and analyze current literature on method and theory in Historical Jesus research.
- Integrate and compare different disciplinary approaches to the historical Jesus.
- Reflect on the ways theology and history interact in the process of reconstruction, understand the politics of interpretation, especially in the case of diverse scholarly portraits of Jesus.

CONTACT
Email is the best way to contact me. czire.szabolcs@gmail.com. I will usually respond to emails within 24 hours.

ECO / THRESHOLDS
This course is designed to support the SKSM emphasis on Educating to Counter Oppressions by embracing an approach that is aware of the social transformational aspects of the Jesus movement, and its vision about a participatory Reign of God that empowers individuals and communities. It encompasses several Threshold Areas, most of all those involving life in religious community, prophetic witness and work, sacred text and interpretation and educating for wholeness and liberation.

COURSE EVALUATION
Assessment will be based on the quality and depth of your engagement with the material and learning community. The course will be conducted on a pass/fail basis. If you need to receive a letter grade, please let me know within the first three weeks.

REQUIREMENTS
Successful completion of the course will be based upon four criteria:
1. Introduction essay (2 pages/10%) – due Sept 13
In order to facilitate a strong learning community and so I can get to know all of you better, you are asked to write a personal essay in which you introduce yourself, discuss your own backgrounds, and about your personal and intellectual acquaintance with (the Historical) Jesus and the study of Bible more generally. You have the option to either email the essay directly to me, or to post it in the forum in order to give other class members a chance to get to know you as well.
2. Biweekly Forum Posts and Responses (45%)
Forum Posts are expected every other week as written reflections on that two week’s assigned readings (2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, 10th, 12th week). **Feel free to read as much as you can.** Reflections should be approximately 800 words. As in a traditional classroom setting, readings should be completed prior to the “meeting” date listed, and the week itself used for posting and interaction. On the Monday of each other week make a primary forum post, and during the week make substantive comments on at least two classmate’s posts (100–200 words).
For the primary forum posts I may, for example, ask you to identify an author’s thesis and main argument, to summarize the position of a selected reading and argue against it, to provide an example that illustrates a key idea, to paraphrase a passage from a selected reading, or to comment on the interpretative position of the author.
Responses should seek to respectfully engage the main points the poster raised by adding something further to the discussion, or by raising clarifying questions.
Responses should be answered by the original poster.
The discussion and responses are a key component to since this is how we become a learning community and engage with each other.
I will read all posts, but I will not respond to each, and will jump in only when I consider it necessary.

3. Film Review (3 pages) (10%) due 13th week
For this assignment you will choose one film from the list of 12 films included in the Syllabus, and are asked to write a critical review in the light of historical Jesus scholarship and modern culture.

4. Final Paper (8–10 pages) (35%) – due Dec 11
Title of the final paper: **The Historical Jesus According to Me (You).** This assignment is designed to give you a focused opportunity to present your integrative competence in relating historical Jesus scholarship. You may choose to focus primarily to one topic discussed, or to create a Jesus portrait, or you may built your paper around a couple events and sayings that you consider to best represent the actions and message of the historical Jesus. Use your imagination combined with scholarship! In each case make it clear your decisions about methodology, evaluate the evidence, engage in dialogue with the primary and secondary literature.

REQUIRED BOOKS
Most of what we read are available online (e.g. Google Books) or will be on Moodle. I try to balance the material between more academic and more popular readings, and also between written and audiovisual material, so you can apply it better to your learning style. You are always welcome to discover new materials.

**Only books to purchase (new or used)**
- Powell, Mark Allan: *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee.* (Westminster John Knox Press; 2 edition, 2013) ISBN: 978-0664234478

COURSE CALENDAR

UNIT ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORICAL JESUS RESEARCH

Week 1 / Sept 7-13 • Historicity of Jesus, history of research (Quests)
Readings:
- Powell: Historians Discover Jesus (first chapter)
- Patterson: Who needs the historical Jesus?; The historical Jesus and the search for God, pp. 1–54
- Marcus Borg: "Why Jesus Matters" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pt0g5UzTZz4


Week 2 / Sept 14-20 • Sources and methodological considerations
Readings:
- Powell: Sources and Criteria. (second chapter)
- Patterson: The Empire of God is Now. (pp. 163–184)
- Ben Witherington: The Historical Jesus https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z22LkbEY5dM

* Due: Forum Posts and Responses

UNIT TWO: THE WORLD OF JESUS

Week 3 / Sept 21-27 • Social and religious matrix
Readings:
- Crossan – Reed: *The Top Ten Discoveries for Excavating Jesus; Layers Upon Layers Upon Layers*. (Excavating Jesus, 1–50)
- Margaret Y. MacDonald: *Constructions of Gender in the Roman Imperial World*. (Understanding the Social World of the New Testament, pp. 44–56)
- Crossan about matrix: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56cojvbaP5Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56cojvbaP5Y)

**Week 4 / Sept 28-Oct 4 • Spiral of violence, social institutions and households**

Readings:
- Crossan – Reed: *Jewish Resistance To Roman Domination* (Excavating Jesus, 136–181)
- Bruce Malina: *Mediterranean Violence and the Kingdom* (Social Gospel of Jesus, pp. 37–70)
- Karen Armstrong on Religion and the History of Violence [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6I-V3iNeFo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6I-V3iNeFo)

* Due: Forum Posts and Responses

**UNIT THREE: EMPIRE OF GOD IN WORDS**

**Week 5 / Sept 5-11 • The radical wisdom in a word**

Readings:
- Crossan: *Kingdom of Wisdom* (The Historical Jesus, 265–302)
- Patterson: *Jesus and the Empire of God: On Dirt, Shame, and Sin in the Expandable Company of Jesus: The Empire in a Word* (pp. 55–118)
- John Shelby Spong - The New Testament: An Evolving Story [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igbKNLSxJ5k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igbKNLSxJ5k)

**Week 6 / Oct 12-18 • Subversive Parables**

Readings:
- William R. Herzog: *Parables as Subversive Speech* (Google Books, as much as you can)
- Patterson: *The Empire in Story* (pp. 119–162)
- Crossan: *The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus* (Google Books, all would be best)
UNIT FOUR: EMPIRE OF GOD IN DEEDS

Week 7 / Oct 19-25 • Healings as political acts
Readings
- Crossan: *The Meaning of Healing* (Birth of Christianity, pp. 293–344)
- Crossan: *Magic and Meal* (The Historical Jesus, pp. 303–353)

Week 8 / Oct 25-Nov 1 • Open commensality as status-leveling and honor-sharing
Readings:
- Mary Douglas: *Deciphering a Meal* (Implicit Meanings: Collected Works, pp. 231-251)
- Crossan: *From Miracle to Table* (The Historical Jesus, pp. 332–353)
- Crossan: *Meal and Community* (Birth of Christianity, pp. 423-444)

UNIT FIVE: SCHOLARLY PORTRAITS OF JESUS

Week 9 / Nov 2 -8 • The Jesus Seminar, Crossan and Borg
Readings
- Powell: pp. 65–112
- Westar Institute/Jesus Seminar [link]

Week 10 / Nov 9-15 • E. P. Sanders, John P. Meier, N. T. Wright and others
Readings:
- Powell: 113–166; 51–64
- *The Resurrection: Historical Event or Theological Interpretation? N.T. Wright vs. John D. Crossan* [link]

* Due: Forum Posts and Responses
UNIT SIX: ALTERNATIVE VOICES

Week 11 / Nov 16-22 • Feminist contributions
Readings
- Elaine Pagels Videos
  https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPaksi_9a57_1armm2Vw0lw
- Susannah Heschel on The Aryan Jesus in Nazi Germany
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnnggA-mIJI&t=281/
- Free choice for an alternative approach.

Week 12 / Nov 23-29 • Multicultural approaches
Readings
- *Did Jesus Die On Cross (BBC Four Documentary)*
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbe3Bw72G-4
- Free choice for Islam, Buddhist or other approaches to the Historical Jesus.

* Due: Forum Posts and Responses

UNIT SEVEN: JESUS ON THE SCREEN

Week 13 / Nov 29-Dec 6 • Jesus films
Watch at least two movies about Jesus from the list below (or outside of this list), and pick up one for the review.
*Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) Norman Jewison
*Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979) Graham Chapman
*The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) George Stevens
*Godspell* (1973) David Greene
*Babbette's Feast* (1988) Gabriel Axel
*Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) Franco Zeffirelli
*Jesus of Montreal* (1990) Denys Arcand
*Au hasard Balthazar* (1966) Robert Bresson
*Color of the Cross* (2006) Jean-Claude La Marre
*A Short Film About Love* (1988) Krzysztof Kieslowski

* Due: Film Review, Dec 6

Week 14 / Dec 7-11 • Final paper
No reading, preparing the final paper.