

Re-Claiming the Bible for a Non-Religious World
Summer 2012
Pacific School of Religion
Monday-Friday, July 16-20, 9:00am-1:00pm
John Shelby Spong

This class will examine the role the Bible might play in a post-Christian world. A pre-requisite to that role is the task of lifting the essential message of the Bible out of the cultural context and world view of the era in which it was written. It will also require an attempt to break critical biblical study out of the academy and to make it available to the man or woman of the street or perhaps still in the pew. This class is organized around the book *Re-Claiming the Bible for a Non-Religious World* published by HarperCollins in November of 2011, but it will go beyond the scope of that book by seeking ways to apply the insights from the Bible to the dying forms of institutional Christianity that mark today's ecclesiastical landscape in order to revivify them.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- a) form a broad view of the role the Bible might play in a post-Christian world,
- b) be able to lift the essential message of the Bible out of the cultural context and world view of the era in which it was written, and
- c) begin to apply the insights from the Bible toward revitalization of institutional Christianity

Class Outline

The Outline of the Class falls into seven units that will be covered in ten lectures over five days. Each lecture will also provide time for questions and discussions.

I Stating the problem

There is no God living above the sky and possessing supernatural power, who can or will intervene in human history or who stands ready to answer our prayers. This theistic concept of God has been destroyed by the expansion of human knowledge. Is God, therefore, dead or can God be re-defined in non-theistic categories? That will be the question posed.

II The Bible

Why it is no longer creditable to assert that the Bible is the "Word of God" in any literal sense. We will examine the powerful defense shield built around the Bible over the centuries, which can no longer be sustained, but which reveals dimensions of the religious mentality.

III The Bible as an Evolving Story

We will examine why the idea of revelation is dying and why we must see the Bible in a new way as an evolving tribal story that finally escapes its limits and opens to new possibilities.

IV Watching the Idea of God be Transformed from a Tribal Entity into an Universal Presence

In this section we will look at the prophets as the places in which the transformation of the thought in the Bible occurred. It will examine a number of the prophetic voices and look at how they redefined God.

V Rooting the Jesus Story in the Jewish Scriptures and in the Life of the Synagogue

I will place the synoptic gospels into their original synagogue setting and allow that setting illumine them in a new way.

VI Watching the Story of Jesus emerge and grow in the First Century of the Common Era-- from the Oral Period to the Fourth Gospel.

VII The Fourth Gospel – Tales of a Jewish Mystic

Daily Schedule Monday – Friday

9.00 a.m. – 10.45 a.m. Lecture I and Discussion

10.45 a.m. – 11.15 a.m. Coffee Break

11.15 a.m. – 1.00 p.m. Lecture II and Discussion

Course Requirements

For CEU credit, students must attend all class sessions and participate fully in class.

For academic credit, students must a) attend all class sessions and participate fully in class (25%), b) complete a paper of five typed pages or 1500 words – no more, no less - on one of several subjects that will be announced on the first day. Five-page papers are due at the beginning of the final class session (50%), and c) complete ten typed pages or 4500 words on a second of the several subjects that will be announced on the first day. The ten page paper is due on Friday, September 27th at 5:00pm. **Late papers will not be accepted.** Email ten page papers to summer@psr.edu (25%).

Study Resources or Bibliography

Required Text:

1. *Re-Claiming the Bible in a Non-Religious World*, by John Shelby Spong. 2011 HarperCollins, San Francisco.

Recommended Texts:

1. Gerhard Von Rad – *The Theology of the Old Testament*

2. Michael Goulder – *Luke, A New Paradigm*
3. E.F. Scott – *The Fourth Gospel – Purpose and Theology*
4. Rudolph Bultmann – *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*
5. C.H. Dodd – *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*
6. Arthur Dewey, Roy Hoover, Lane McGaughey, Darryl Schmidt – *The Authentic Letters of Paul*
7. Elaine Pagels - *Beyond Belief*
8. James Cone - *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*
9. John Shelby Spong – *Liberating the Gospels: Reading the Bible with Jewish Eyes*
Why Christianity Must Change or Die
A New Christianity for a New World
The Sins of Scripture
Here I Stand: My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love and Equality

PSR Policies

Familiarize yourself with PSR's student policies at <http://www.psr.edu/student-policies>.
 Grading policy: <http://www.psr.edu/grades>
 Plagiarism policy: <http://www.psr.edu/plagiarism-policy>
 English as Second Language (ESL) Policy: http://www.psr.edu/ESL_policy

The Lecturer

John Shelby Spong has been a priest and a bishop for 56 years in the Episcopal Church. He has also taught at Harvard Divinity School, the Graduate Theological Union, the University of the Pacific and Drew Theological School. He was the Wm. Belden Noble Lecturer at Harvard University in 2000. Those lectures were published under the title *A New Christianity for a New World*. He has also been the Quatercentenary Scholar at Cambridge University and a Scholar in Residence at Oxford University.

In 2010 his portrait was commissioned and hung in the King Chapel of Morehead College for his contribution to civil rights, particularly the civil rights of gay and lesbian people.

The author of 24 books which have sold over a million copies, he delivers approximately 150 lectures a year at universities, conference centers and churches across the world. He is the author of a weekly on-line column that is opened about 100,000 times week.

This will be his seventh time to be on the faculty of this summer school.

Bishop Spong's Website www.JohnShelbySpong.Com

He may be reached through his publisher at support@JohnShelbySpong.com