COURSE TITLE: Biblical Literalism: A Gentile Heresy

The purpose of the course will be to establish the fact of history that the three Synoptic Gospels are the products of the First Century Synagogue, in which Jesus was wrapped inside the Hebrew Scriptures, organized by the liturgical cycle of the Synagogue, invested with Jewish messianic interpretations and are reflective of the story telling traditions of the Jewish people. Biblical literalism was imposed on the gospels by Gentile Christians after 150 CE, unaware of their original Jewish meanings. Only in the last 100 years has this Gentile captivity been broken open.

The subtitle of the course is: “A Journey into a New Christianity through the Lens of Matthew’s Gospel”

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Ten two-hour sessions each day: 9.00 – 10.45, 11.15 – 1 00 p.m.

The two hours will be divided into a lecture or formal presentation, followed by discussion either in small groups or as a committee of the whole, depending on the size of the students enrolled. A 30-minute coffee and rest break will divide the two sessions.

Requirement for credit:

1) Attendance at all sessions.
2) Active participation in discussions.
3) A 5-10 page paper on some aspect of Matthew’s Gospel. A list of possible subjects included.


Session One: Using Mark to establish the liturgical organization of Matthew’s Gospel.
Session Two: Breaking the Literalistic Frame of Reference.
Session Three: The Secret behind the Virgin Birth.
Session Four: The Figure of Joseph – Literary and Midrash
Session Five: The Shadow of Moses in Matthew
Session Six: The Sermon on the Mount and the Lord’s Prayer – Matthew’s words, not Jesus’.
Session Seven: Jesus as the New Temple – the story of the Transfiguration.

Session Eight: Judas Iscariot – A Figure of History or a Literary Creation?

Session Nine: Matthew’s Version of the Resurrection.

Session Ten: From the Star in the East to the Great Commission: The Matthaen Interpretive Envelope

**The Required paper:** A five to ten-page paper on some aspect of the Gospel of Matthew

Some suggested topics:

- The Birth Narrative in Matthew
- The Role of John the Baptist in Matthew
- The Sermon on the Mount
- The Parables unique to Matthew: The Wise and Foolish Maidens, the Judgment that separated the Sheep from Goats.
- The Meaning of Yom Kippur in Matthew
- The Meaning of Sukkoth in Matthew
- The Meaning of Dedication in Matthew
- Is the Connection between the Crucifixion and the Passover historical or liturgical?
- The Role of Judas in Matthew
- Is the Role of Pilate historical or interpretive?
- Matthew’s Understanding of the Resurrection
- Matthew’s Understanding of the Great Commission
  OR
- Create your own topic related to Matthew’s Gospel

Paper Topics due on Tuesday

Papers due on Thursday

**Bibliography:** In addition to the text for the class: Biblical Literalism: A Gentile Heresy, these additional books are recommended

1) Any works of Michael D. Goulder that are or can be made available. They are all out of print and available only in the best theological libraries.
2) Amy Jill Levine – “The Misunderstood Jesus” and “A Feminist Companion To Matthew,” written with Marianne Blickestaff
3) James Cone – “The Cross and the Lynching Tree”
4) Any modern and competent commentary on Matthew
Educational Background of Bishop Spong:

Bachelor of Arts degree, University of North Carolina: Major in philosophy and zoology

Master of Divinity from Virginia Theological Seminary

Ordained priest 1955 and bishop 1976 of the Episcopal Church

Special Study done at Union Seminary in New York; Yale Divinity School in New Haven; Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge; University of Edinburgh in Edinburgh; Magdalen College, Oxford University.

Honors: Quatercentenary Scholar, Emmanuel College, Cambridge 1992

Scholar in Residence, Christ Church, Oxford University 1998

William Belden Noble Lecturer, Harvard University, 2000

Honorary Degrees: St. Paul’s College D.D.

Virginia Theological Seminary D.D.

Muhlenberg College D.H.L.

Lehigh University D.H.L.

Holmes Institute D.H.L.

University of North Carolina D.H.L.

Drew University D.H.L.

His portrait was commissioned and hangs today in the Hall of Honor for Heroes of the Civil Rights movement at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Chapel of Morehouse College in Atlanta.

“You have done for Lesbians and Gay Men what Martin Luther King, Jr. did for people of color.”

The Chaplain of the King Chapel, Morehouse College

Teaching Assignments;

Harvard Divinity School

Graduate Theological Union

The Pacific School of Religion

The University of the Pacific

The Theological School of Drew University
Author of 25 books, which have sold over a million and a half copies.

Weekly Columnist for 16 years for Progressive Christianity.org, visit him at www.johnshelbyspong.com

8 times guest lecturer at the Chautauqua Institution, Chautauqua, New York

Holds record for drawing the largest audience to the religious lecture in Chautauqua history – between 10,000 and 12,500 for the week.