

NETE 90970

Before Religion and Race: Modern Categories and the Study of the New* Testament World
Thursdays 1-3:30pm

Instructor: Jeremy L. Williams, Ph.D.

Prerequisites:

This class is designed as a Ph.D. seminar. Advanced masters students may request permission from the instructor to be admitted to the class.

Description of Content:

The ancient Roman world and the contemporary world, influenced by Western philosophical traditions, are separated by centuries but connected through texts. Indeed, ancient people understood race and religion differently than modern people; however, this course will expose the pitfalls and utility of using the modern categories of religion and race for reconstructing the ancient world. The course will explore how race and religion can provide frameworks for assessing the sociopolitical processes at work in texts and the communities that produced them. The course keeps an eye on these categories to examine how ancient texts were embedded in ancient discourses about politics, ethnicity, family, loyalty, ethics, community, belonging, and exclusion.

The course will explore how ancient people conceived of genealogy, homeland, and citizenship and how those conceptions come to bear on Jewishness, Christian identity, and the early Jesus followers' use of terms like "adoption," "family," "nation," and even "faith." This is of particular interest for students of New* Testament texts, because the earliest Jesus-following communities were in the Roman Empire, which did not claim to separate "church and state." Roman cities boasted temples and festivals that celebrated deities including the emperor and his family. Roman practices that modern people would consider religious worked to maintain Roman hegemony, local control, civic commitments, and ethnic identity, especially for people in the provinces.

This course will also examine how attention to race and religion in the ancient world can provide strategies for understanding, confronting, and employing race and religion in our world.

Class Procedures:

This course is a once-a-week seminar that anticipates vibrant, informed discussions of assigned materials. Students will also make presentations throughout the semester, lead discussions, and lead a workshop on their own work.

Requirements:

1. Attendance and informed participation in the class sessions
2. Book Review
3. One presentation on assigned reading for week
4. Leading a workshop on student's research-in-progress
5. Respond to another student's research-in-progress
6. Seminar paper (6,000-9,000 words)

Texts:

Texts will be provided online.

Grading Procedures:

Book Review	10%
Book Presentation	20%
Research-in-Progress Workshop	20%
Response to Research-in Progress Workshop	10%
Seminar paper	40%