

Alternative Truths in Christianity

The Gospels We Never Hear

"Super" Jesus Seminar on the Road

November 1–4, 2018

Auburn, California

We live in an age of multiple truths and uncertain futures. We live in a culture where trusted techniques of research and critical thinking have been subject to scorn and labelled fake news. Christianity is no stranger to speaking truth to power, nor to value diversity in truth without succumbing to the cynicism of fake truth. In its earliest expressions, Christianity was able to sustain diversity and to challenge dominating powers. This heritage leads contemporary Christian theology to ask new questions about God, truth, and value outside the distorted expressions of power today.



Celene Lillie (Ph.D., Union Theological Seminary) is the Director of the Tanho Center and on the pastoral staff at Boulder First United Methodist Church in Colorado. She is the author of several books, including *The Rape of Eve: The Transformation of Roman Ideology in Three Early Christian Retellings of Genesis* (2017).



Stephen J. Patterson (Ph.D., Claremont Graduate School) is Geo. H. Atkinson Professor of Religious and Ethical Studies at Willamette University. He is the author of many books, most recently *The Lost Way: How Two Forgotten Gospels Are Rewriting the Story of Christian Origins* (2014).



David Galston (Ph.D., McGill University) is the Executive Director of the Westar Institute and the Ecumenical Chaplain at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, where he is also an Adjunct Professor of Philosophy. He is the author of *Embracing the Human Jesus* (Polebridge Press) and *Archives and the Event of God* (McGill-Queens Press).



Karen Bray (Ph.D., Drew University) is an Assistant Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Wesleyan College and a candidate for Unitarian Universalist minister. She is interested in how secular institutions and cultures behave theologically. Her work has been published in various academic journals.

Program Details

Alternative Christianities: A Complex Birth Story

Stephen Patterson and Celene Lillie

The story about Christianity arising from Jesus, being passed on to the Apostles, flowering with orthodoxy, and defeating heresy is a false narrative. The story is one of the longest standing "alternative truths" of the Christian tradition. The real story is one of diversity, political struggle, various forms of social resistance, and interesting spiritual options. To hear the real story, we need to break through simple myths and recover complex history.

Thursday evening, 7–8:30 pm

Friday, 9:30–10:30 am Alternative Theologies: Surprises in History and Today

Karen Bray and David Galston

Christian theology, like the story of Christian origins, is often presented as a set of stable and eternal truths. However, Christian theology has actually taken diverse expression and held several different forms in both ancient and modern times. We will look back at and then forward to alternative theologies in the Christian tradition.

Friday, 11 am–noon Alternative Gospels: Findings from Nag Hammadi

Celene Lillie and Stephen Patterson

The central concern for Paul is not faith in Jesus but the faithfulness of Jesus. The main way for community members to live faithfully is to live in the body of God's Anointed. This is not an emphasis on individualism. Paul stresses practices and relationships where the "foolishness" of God challenges the normal hierarchies of power.

Friday, 1:30–2:30 pm Alternative God(s): The Changing Face of a Divine Being

David Galston and Karen Bray

God in the modern era has had shifting identities from liberal to conservative, from existentialist to process, and even from colonial to a post-colonial and anti-colonial theology. Some may wish to ask if the real God could please stand up.

Friday, 3–4 pm Breakout Session

Scholars will join participants in group discussions.

Friday, 7–8:30 pm An Alternative Empire: Jesus Outside Imperial Theology

Stephen Patterson

The surprise discovery of the Gospel of Thomas in 1945 is an event unrivaled in the study of Christian origins. Who wrote it? Where? And why does it sound so different from the canonical gospels? Stephen Patterson will unlock some of the secrets from this new gospel that was written outside the Roman Empire.

Saturday, 9:30–10:30 am Alternative Ecologies: Theology in a New Age

Karen Bray

Standard theology speaks of a transcendental God who watches over creation, but new theology speaks of God's immanence in the natural world, about God becoming with the world, and about the significance of the idea to God outside the limits of human experience. Eco-theology is a lost alternative theology that is arising today with new importance.

Saturday, 11 am–noon Alternative Voices: Women in the Rise of Christianity

Celene Lillie

Nag Hammadi texts uncover the voices of women from antiquity. The earliest Christian communities had surprising spaces not only for the voices of women but also for the protests of women. We will listen to some of the voices of protest and consider how they resonate with similar issues in women's experiences today.

Saturday, 1:30–2:30 pm Alternative Church: Taking the Historical Jesus Seriously

David Galston

The historical Jesus is a remarkable "alternative" to the Jesus of Christianity and does challenge the church to change its understanding of worship, of teaching, and of meals. We will look at some of the practices that a church can follow and some of the lessons that a church can teach if room is made for the historical Jesus.

Saturday, 3–4 pm Panel Discussion

Galston, Bray, and Lillie will make closing comments and share Q and A with the audience.

Sunday Services 10:00am

Join us during Sunday services at First Congregational Church of Auburn UCC for more from Westar scholars.