

**Reading Paul in the Shadow of Empire**  
**Sylvia Keesmaat**  
**One Week Intensive, Fall 2022**

**DRAFT**

Professor: Dr. Sylvia C. Keesmaat

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Class Schedule: Daily, 9am - 12 noon; 1pm-4pm, November 7-11, 2022.

Location: TBD

**Course Description**

With a focus primarily on Paul's letter to the Romans, this course will explore how Paul called followers of Jesus to a life of faithfulness at the heart of the Roman empire. Reading Romans from below, as a letter written to communities struggling with what it means to be faithful in a context of slavery, poverty and violence, provides a context for reflecting on how Paul's words address the challenges of colonialism, violence and the climate crisis today.

**Objectives**

It is anticipated that students taking this course will be able to:

1. Situate Paul's writings in the context of first century imperial culture, myth, and social structure, as well as within the scriptures of Israel and the gospel of Jesus, so as to discern the complex negotiations of Paul's writings in relation to imperial realities, first century Judaism, and the gospel.
2. Discern the central themes of Paul's writings in relation to the contexts of first century believers in order to articulate his theology, particularly in relation to the letter to the Romans.
3. Gain a critical appreciation of Paul's hermeneutic in relation to his scriptures.
4. Become critically aware of the intersection of violence and power in the first century and the way in which Paul's letters confront, undermine and occasionally mimic such power.
5. Become knowledgeable about different approaches to interpreting major Pauline themes.
6. Develop an ability to read Paul in dynamic analogy with his own cultural and colonial context and our own cultural and colonial context.
7. Constructively and creatively discern how Paul's portrayal of the gospel illuminates contemporary struggles with injustice, violence and colonial oppression.

**Reading Materials and Texts**

Students are advised to complete all class readings before the start of the course.

When reading in advance for the course, students should take notes on the reading in whatever form is helpful (words, pictures, song), and jot down any questions about the text, as well as any disagreements or points of agreement or convergence. This will aid in reviewing the material before we discuss it in class.

**NB:** Note that this reading list might undergo slight revision. However, *Romans Disarmed* will definitely be the major course textbook. A final version of the shorter readings will be posted in September.

Baker, Mark D. and J. Ross Wagner, "Reading Romans in Hurricane-Ravaged Honduras: A Model of Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Conversation" *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXII, No. 3, (July 2004), 367-383. Reprinted in *Navigating Romans Through Cultures: Challenging Readings by Charting a New Course* ed. By Yeo Khiok-khng (K.K.). (T&T Clark, 2004) pp. 95-112. (article can be accessed here: <https://www.bibleremixed.ca/reading-paul-in-the-shadow-of-empire>)

Sylvia C. Keesmaat and Brian J. Walsh, *Romans Disarmed: Resisting Empire, Demanding Justice*. Brazos Press, 2019.

Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, Chapter two (pp. 34-83).

Steven J. Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus" *JSNT* 26.3 (2004) 323-361. (article can be accessed here: <https://www.bibleremixed.ca/reading-paul-in-the-shadow-of-empire>)

Wagner, J. Ross. *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul in Concert in the Letter to the Romans*. Leiden: Brill, 2003, pp. 341-359. (chapter can be accessed here: <https://www.bibleremixed.ca/reading-paul-in-the-shadow-of-empire>)

### **Class Format**

This course will be offered as a one week intensive consisting of lecture, seminar discussion, and student's questions and comments based on course readings. Students will be evaluated based on participation, questions and comments, reflection paper, and a 12-15 page research paper. Each class a few students will be asked to help frame the discussion by sharing one or two questions or comments about the readings.

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please approach me before the start of the course at [s.keesmaat@utoronto.ca](mailto:s.keesmaat@utoronto.ca) to discuss accommodations and accessibility.

### **Course Delivery**

This course will be held in-person, with an option for distance participation in real-time. There will be no recordings available of the class, and no lecture notes made available in any format beyond attendance in class, whether written or by video. Occasional handouts will be made available in class and by email.

### **Contact with Instructor**

The instructor will be available for interactions with students before and after class, as well as by email at [s.keesmaat@utoronto.ca](mailto:s.keesmaat@utoronto.ca). After the end of the course the instructor can also be contacted via Zoom, Facebook live, or phone at 705.887.9429. Note that this is a land line, hence it does not accept texts.

### Course Requirements Summary

1. Completion of readings and the ability to discuss them in a seminar context (30%).
2. One short reflection paper, due the last day of class, five pages long (20%)
3. One research paper, 12-15 pages (50%) due mid December. A proposal for this research paper, to be submitted the Monday after the end of class, must be approved by the instructor.

### Attendance and Class Participation

For an intensive course of this nature, it is anticipated that students will be present for every class prepared to discuss the class readings. It is advisable that all class readings be completed before the start of the course.

### Course Outline

Day 1:	Introduction: The Story of Rome and the Story of Israel; Hermeneutical Issues; Paul's Communities; Romans 16 and Reading from Below (referencing also Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, Corinthians). <b>Readings:</b> <i>Romans Disarmed</i> , ch 1-3. Baker and Wagner.
Day 2:	Creational Roots, Idolatry, and Creational Hope: Reading Romans: The Shape of the Letter and chapters 1-8 (referencing also: 2 Corinthians, Thessalonians, Colossians, and Ephesians). <b>Readings:</b> <i>Romans Disarmed</i> ch. 5.
Day 3:	Whose Story? Aeneas, Abraham and Israel: Reading Romans, chapters 4, 9-11 (referencing also Galatians, Philippians, Colossians). <b>Readings:</b> <i>Romans Disarmed</i> , ch 4; Hays, <i>Echoes of Scripture</i> 34-83. ; Wagner, <i>Heralds of the Good News</i> 341-359.
Day 4:	Imperial Honour, Violence, and the State versus a Community of Welcoming Generosity: Reading Romans chapters 12-15 (referencing also Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians and Ephesians). <b>Readings:</b> <i>Romans Disarmed</i> , ch 6-8.
Day 5:	Reading Paul into the future. The letters as a whole and the believing community then and now. <b>Readings:</b> <i>Romans Disarmed</i> , ch 9-10.