BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
THEO 410-01
THEO 500-01

PLACE: St. Louis University, Xavier Hall, 122.
TIME: Fall Semester, 2008-2009; Thursdays, 3:45-6:15 P.M.
INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Bernhard A. Asen. Theology Digest, Humanities Building 248
Office phone: 977-2857; Email: Asen@SLU.EDU; Home phone: 862-1423.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course is intended to introduce students to a field that is increasingly important in
contemporary theology—biblical interpretation (hermeneutics). Hermeneutics involves
the theory of understanding and interpreting texts. We will survey the history of biblical
hermeneutics, including the Old and New Testaments, rabbinic Judaism, the early church,
and the history of hermeneutical theory up to the present time. The course objective is to
help students toward a greater appreciation and understanding of the richness and
diversity of biblical interpretation and the sources and norms that serve as its basis. Class
periods will consist of lectures, class presentations, dialogue and discussion. Participation
in the discussions will be very important to our mutual growth and learning. By the end
of the course students will have read the texts listed below, as well as certain assigned,
and other readings of the student's choice.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
For as long as people have read the bible they have interpreted it in various ways. Close
attention will be paid to how different generations have thought about biblical
interpretation. By the end of the course students will have learned about major trends in
twenty-two centuries of learned biblical interpretation, how each generation brings its
own pre-understandings to the interpretive task, and that all interpretations are not equal.

SKILL ACQUISITIONS
Skills acquired will include: how to read biblical texts in their historical contexts, how to
evaluate various kinds of biblical interpretation, and how to relate Old Testament to New
Testament texts and themes.

REQUIRED TEXTS
The Holy Bible. Any version is acceptable, but The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the
Apocrypha or the New RSV (Catholic Edition) are preferred. Be sure the Bible you use
contains both Testaments. Please bring your bible to every class period.


Montague, George T. Understanding the Bible. A Basic Introduction to Biblical
Interpretation (New York: Paulist Press, 1997).

The Pontifical Biblical Commission. The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church
(Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1994). This document is also
available online.

Pontifical Biblical Commission. *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*. (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2002). This document is also available online.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**

If you cannot be in class, please call me at my home or office. Unexcused absences are unacceptable. **More than three (3) unexcused absences will drop your grade one level (A becomes B, etc.).**

**ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS**

Any student who feels that he/she may need academic accommodations in order to meet the requirements of this course-as outlined in the syllabus, due to the presence of a disability, should contact the Office of Disabilities Services. Please telephone the office at 314-977-2930, or visit Room 131 in the Academic Resources Center, 3840 Lindell Blvd. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Students are expected to be honest in their academic work. The University reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. Such conduct shall include cases of plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information in examinations, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes. Violations should be reported to your course instructor, who will investigate and adjudicate them according to the *Policy on Academic Honesty* of the College of Arts & Sciences. If the charges are found to be true, the student may be liable for academic or disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion by the University.

**THE FIVE DIMENSIONS**

In its educational mission Saint Louis University is committed to the following five dimensions: 1) Scholarship and knowledge, 2) Intellectual inquiry and communication, 3) Community building, 4) Leadership and service, 5) Spirituality and values. As we proceed through the course outline below it is hoped that you will find how these dimensions are richly present in the history of biblical interpretation. For example: 1) Learning to read texts in context and acquiring knowledge about the basic meaning of words in their original language, as well as the political background and theological message of scripture, will prepare students for further study. 2) This in turn will help to better understand that the biblical writings were, above all else, meant to communicate a specific message that, while historically conditioned, also has meaning and importance for today’s world. Many of the major interpreters through history were thoroughly engaged with the people and powers of their day. 3) Throughout history interpreters also placed a high value on the importance of community in the interpretive process and 4) many of them were also important and influential leaders in their communities who led
by example and had a deep appreciation for the interconnectedness of national as well as local concerns. 5) In the end, St. Augustine sums it up best: "So if it seems to you that you have understood the divine scriptures, or any part of them, in such a way that by this understanding you do not build up this twin love of God and neighbor, then you have not understood them" (De doctrina Christiana, Book One, 40).

EVALUATION PROCEDURES
1. There will be three (3) synthesis papers required from all students: September 11, October 16, and November 6, 2008. The papers should be two or three typed pages and include your questions, probing, and reactions to the readings, as well as to the material presented and discussed in class. I will read them and return them with some brief comments. These papers will not be graded but are a course requirement.
2. Each undergraduate student will submit two (2) critical reviews (3-5 pages) on periodical articles dealing with some aspect of biblical interpretation. Graduate students will submit three (3) such articles and one (1) book (Consult Elenchus, OT Abstracts, NT Abstracts, The Index of Religious Periodicals, the attached bibliography, on-line data bases, et al., for things that interest you or that may be helpful for numbers 3-4 below. Reviews due: December 4, 2008.
3. Each undergraduate student will take a Mid-term exam (October 16, 2008). The Mid-term exam will be take-home. There will be no final exam. Rather, each undergraduate will write an 8-10 page paper on some aspect of biblical hermeneutics.
4. Graduate students are not required to take the exams, but will write a research paper (20-30 pages) on some aspect of biblical hermeneutics using standard research and writing procedures.
5. At least once during the semester (more if you wish) each student will visit me in my office.
6. A final synthesis paper (3-5 pages; typed) due Thursday, December 4, 2008 is required of all students.
7. All students are required to complete the on-line course evaluation at the end of the course. The time when it will be available will be announced in class.

*COURSE OUTLINE AND TENTATIVE SCHEDULE FOR CLASSES

August 28
Course introduction: Finding common ground: Introduction to biblical interpretation, terminologies, categories and approaches. Read for next class: Understanding the Bible, pp. 1-28; The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, pp. 1-13; The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible.

September 4
Jewish hermeneutics in the First Century: Midrash, pesher and allegorical interpretation. Read for next class: Understanding the Bible, pp. 29-51; Johnson/Kurz, pp. 3-63.

September 11
Hermeneutics and the Old Testament: the historical frame of reference. Read for
next class: Johnson/Kurz, pp. 64-142. **Synthesis Paper due.**

**September 18**  
The Alexandrian and Antiochian schools of biblical hermeneutics. Read for next class: *Understanding the Bible*, pp. 52-72

**September 25**  
Hermeneutics in the Middle Ages: the "Four Senses" of scripture. Read for next class: *Understanding the Bible*, pp. 73-94.

**October 2**  
Hermeneutics from the Reformation to the Enlightenment. Read for next class: *Understanding the Bible*, pp. 95-123.

**October 9**  
New Testament hermeneutics. Read for next class: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, pp. 20-23. **Distribution of the Mid-term exam to undergraduates.**

**October 16**  
Hermeneutics from Friedrich Schleiermacher to Karl Barth. Synthesis Paper due. **Mid-term exam returned.**

**October 23**  
The Merging of Horizons: the hermeneutics of Hans Georg Gadamer

**October 30**  

**November 6**  
Hermeneutics and Symbolic systems: the work of Paul Ricoeur. Read for next class: *Understanding the Bible*, pp. 159-210; *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, pp. 24-34; Johnson/Kurz, pp. 182-202, 263-287. **Synthesis Paper due.**

**November 13**  
Hermeneutics, theologians and the magisterium. Read for next class: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, pp. 35-42.

**November 20**  
Toward a hermeneutical paradigm.

**November 27**  
No Class. Thanksgiving Holiday

**December 4**  
Summary and conclusion. **Final periodical reports, synthesis papers, and research**
papers due.

*I say "tentative" because we will stress understanding, comprehension and dialogue rather than speed. It may be necessary here and there to abbreviate certain sections and lengthen others. If at any time you have questions, comments, problems, or you just want to talk, please feel free to drop by my office.

**Select Bibliography**

**Biblical Hermeneutics**


Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Earliest Christianity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).


Fish, Stanley. Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).


Hagen, Kenneth, ed. The Bible in the Churches: How Different Christians Interpret the Scriptures. 2nd ed. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994).


Knight, D. A. and Tucker, G. M. (eds.). The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters


________. *Historical Handbook of Major biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove, Il1. InterVarsity, 1998).


Perrin, Norman. *What is Redaction Criticism?* Guides to Biblical Scholarship


______ (ed.). "The Effects of Women's Studies on Biblical Studies," in *Journal for the


About the Papers

The research paper for graduate students should be 20-30 pages in length, typed, double-spaced and include a bibliography of sources consulted and cited. The paper for undergraduate students should be 8–10 pages. You may use any standard style sheet (e.g., Turabian, MLA, Chicago Manual of Style, etc.). I am willing to read outlines, rough drafts, or help with the selection of a topic.

The periodical reports should contain the following basic elements: 1) a brief review of the major thrust of the article or book (thesis); 2) comments on the audience for whom the article is written (i.e., scholars, laypeople); 3) an evaluation of the usefulness of the article and whether you think the author accomplished his/her stated purpose.

The final synthesis paper should be approximately three (3) pages long. It is not meant to be a repetition of the course, but a summary of a few ideas, themes, etc., that you found interesting and worthwhile over the course of the semester.

Some Suggestions for Topics

The following are some suggestions for possible paper topics or areas in which to read for your periodical and book reports. They are meant only as suggestions. If you need further help in formulating your topic or want me to read outlines, rough drafts, etc, I am happy to do so.

1. Pick one of the following forms of biblical hermeneutics and write a paper on how it began, who its major proponents were/are and what the method seeks to accomplish: historical criticism, source criticism, form criticism, tradition-historical criticism, redaction criticism, social-scientific criticism, canonical criticism, rhetorical criticism and intertextuality, structural criticism, narrative criticism, reader-response criticism, post-structural criticism, feminist criticism, socio-economic/liberationist criticism.

2. Pick an historical period and discuss the major aspects of its hermeneutical method, e.g., Rabbinic interpretation in the apostolic era, Talmudic interpretation, the hermeneutics, of Paul, the Evangelists, the Middle Ages, Reformation, etc.

3. Pick an historical figure and discuss his/her hermeneutical method, e.g., Origen, Irenaeus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Augustine, Hildegard of Bingen, Luther, Calvin, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, etc.

4. Pick a specific biblical text from either Testament and demonstrate how a given
interpretation understands that text (see #1 above).

5. Pick a specific biblical text/texts and develop a lesson plan for teaching it to a specific audience using a specific hermeneutical approach, e.g., K-8, adult study group, young adults, etc.

6. Pick a "non-traditional" text, e.g., a piece of art, sculpture, cathedral, church, mosaic, etc. and discuss its interpretive use of images.

7. Pick a specific non-Christian religious tradition and discuss its sacred writings and the method/methods of interpretation that the tradition uses.

Grading Scale for Undergraduate Mid-term

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<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-93</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>92-90</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>61-0</td>
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The following are general principles of the Department of Theological Studies concerning grading standards and criteria:

**A range = Superior, exceptional, outstanding** with evidence of critical, informed, and creative theological inquiry that deepens their understanding of essential theological/historical concepts. This means the student demonstrates depth of insight beyond what is normally expected. Carefully nuanced reasoning and writing, free from material, structural and grammatical error are presupposed in this grade.

**B range = Good, ready command** of full range of concepts and shows some critical, informed, and creative inquiry that deepens their understanding of essential theological/historical concepts. This means the student has produced an assignment that is free from material, structural and grammatical errors.

**C range = Acceptable, satisfactory ability** to describe overall picture and essential concepts. This means the student has completed the assignment in a manner involving no significant errors. Material may not be free from structural and grammatical errors. Nuanced reasoning is not demonstrated.

**D range = Below normal expectation.** Reasoning is neither carefully nuanced nor coherently presented; writing is insufficient in depth of insight and/or use of texts; presentation is not free from material error in structure, spelling and grammar. This
means that the student failed to respond adequately to the assignment and its intentions.

F = Unsatisfactory. The student failed to respond to the assignment: 1) failed to turn in the assignment; 2) did not respond to the assignment as given; 3) submitted work so thoroughly flawed as to indicate that the student did not make a serious effort, 4) plagiarism or cheating involved.