

Biblical Authority & Interpretation

Syllabus version 4.3*

IST1009-1-Winter 2018

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Mondays 1-4:30

**N.B. The most current information about readings and assignments will be found on the Canvas course site, so please be sure to consult the site regularly.*

INTRODUCTION

This course fulfills the Interdisciplinary Seminar (IS) requirement for MTS, MDiv, MASJE, and MAPSC. The purpose of the course is to expose incoming students to the relevance of the academic, interdisciplinary study of religion and theology. It is designed to help students recognize from the first year of study that theological/religious studies disciplines work together to generate significant knowledge that matters to the world. This course also provides a core first year experience and orientation to academic skills necessary for success at the graduate level.

Learning goals for the Interdisciplinary Seminar:

1. Students identify and describe characteristic approaches to the academic study of religion related to at least four of the six curricular areas identified in the core curriculum.
2. Students demonstrate critical reading skills, such as the capacity to identify the thesis of a text, its methodology, the contextual situation of the author's argument in a larger discourse, the contours of its argument, and the implications of its constructive work.
3. Students demonstrate the capacity to write a brief, thesis-driven paper drawing on textual resources with appropriate academic citation and a writing style appropriate to the genre.
4. Students are able to identify appropriate academic resources through library research in order to address a research question of significance to them.
5. Students engage in critical, respectful, and constructive academic dialogue and reflection in a diverse cultural setting (the classroom).
6. Student motivation, curiosity, and commitment to the engaged academic study of religion and theology increases.

Course Description for this Seminar:

Debates over biblical authority within Christianity and in the public square are common place in American society. Such debates have a long history. "Biblical Authority and Interpretation" examines a wide range of perspectives on scriptural authority and interpretation from the history of Christianity and beyond. Engaging with such a variety of attitudes toward the Bible, its translation, and interpretation will help students think critically about their own use of scripture, and begin to articulate thoughtfully their own positions on

the uses of Scripture in our contemporary world.

The student learning goals for this course are as follows:

- 1) Students will understand that the role of the Bible in Christian tradition, the various ways in which it has been granted authority, and arguments for its proper interpretation have been contested throughout the tradition.
- 2) Students will become familiar with the views on the Bible and biblical interpretation of some of the key figures in the history.
- 3) Students will understand the ways in which modernity has challenged biblical authority and understand the stakes over the debate about the Bible's status for Christians.
- 4) Students will have the opportunity to engage with experienced preachers about the use of the Bible in their preaching, and what status the Bible holds in their tradition.
- 5) Students will practice the skills of theological research and theological writing.
- 6) Students will begin to articulate their own positions on biblical authority and interpretation.

All readings for the course will be available on Canvas.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES & READINGS

Week One - Sept 10

Introductions | Using the Library (Guest: Micah Saxton) | Bible? What Bible? (PE) | Augustine

Assignment:

- Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Preface, Bk 1, pars. 1-2; Bk. 3, pars. 1-6, 9-13, 47-49

Week Two - Sept 17

Can the Bible Contain Falsehoods? | Guest: Rabbi Evette Lutman

Assignment: Letters of Augustine and Jerome

- Letters #28, #40, #71
- Jerome's response: #75

Week Three – Sept 24

The Bible in the Reformation Age | Introducing David Hume (TV) | Guest: Rev. Anthony Roberts |

Assignments:

- Luther, *Concerning the Letter and the Spirit*, pp. TBA
- Preface to KJV, Text of the Preface (Links to an external site.) - read parts 4, 7, 10.
- Optional: view pages of original KJV Bible: Link to the Virtual King James exhibit at

Ohio State University (Links to an external site.)

Week Four – Oct 1

The Enlightenment and Modernism | Guest: Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber

Assignments:

- Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section II “On the Origin of Ideas, Section IV “Sceptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of Understanding” Part I; Section X “Of Miracles.” (Pages for these readings are as follows: 9-13, 15-20, and 72-90.)

Week Five – Oct 8

Historicism and Skepticism | The Rise of Historical Criticism (PE) |

Assignments:

- Reimarus, *Fragments*, Pars. 3-4, 46-47 (pages 64-67 and 229-232)
Lessing, “On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power” and “The Education of the Human Race” (pages 51-56 and 82-98)

Week Six – Oct 15

The Modernist Controversy: Presbyterians Debate New Methods of Studying the Bible | Guest: Rev. Jerry Hershops

Assignments:

- Charles Briggs’s *Inaugural Address* upon assuming Edward Robinson Chair in Biblical Theology at Union Theological Seminary (Links to an external site.) (link takes you to the volume in which the speech was published (1891) in Princeton Theological Seminary Library), Your assignment is to read Chap III (pages 24-42), though if you'd like to read more....please do!
- Archibald Hodge and Benjamin Warfield, *Inspiration*, pages 17-31. It's a long essay about what it means to say the Bible is divinely inspired, originally published in the *Presbyterian Review* in 1881, and subsequently as a book.

Week Seven – Oct 22

Christian Denominational Statements – In-class Assignment | Writing Prep | Introducing Friedrich Schleiermacher (TV)

Assignment:

Gather one or two denominational statements on biblical authority. We will review these statements together in class with help from Micah Saxton, who will visit class to demonstrate how to use some online tools for digital analysis, such as Voyant.

Week Eight – Oct 29

Friedrich Schleiermacher | Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Assignments:

- Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, Propositions 15-16; 128-132 (pp 76-83; 590-611)
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Selections from *The Women's Bible* (Links to an external site.) Read the following entries: “Introduction;” and “Genesis, chaps. I- III”

Week Nine – Nov 5 (Michael presents?)

Twentieth Century Lutherans Reflect on Romans and Hermeneutics | Guest: Rev. Clover Beal |

Assignments:

- Karl Barth, *Dogmatics*, excerpt from pp. 88-95.
- Krister Stendahl, “Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West” pp. 78-96 in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*

Week Ten – Nov 12

Assignments:

- Miguel de la Torre, *The Politics of Jesus*, chap. 4.
- Other, TBA

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment #1: Author Background

Each student performs this assignment only once. Using the sign-up tool on the course Canvas page, pick one author from the schedule of readings. **Post to Canvas a useful orientation to the author: dates, places, main themes, why they are important, interesting anecdotes, etc.** The point is to provide some context and articulate some of what readers can expect. You have a lot of freedom with the format, though brevity is preferred over information overload. You can simply post text (250 words max, please), or a video, YouTube clip, etc. etc. At the end please include 2 or 3 links to further reliable information. In addition to posting information on Canvas, students should be prepared to spend five minutes in class contextualizing the reading for their fellow students the week before we discuss that author.

Due one week prior to the week we discuss the author(s) in question.

Weight toward grade: 10%

Assignment #2: Summary of an Assigned Text

Students choose a specific text and 1) write a short paragraph summarizing what the

author's main argument is; and 2) articulate 2-3 questions or observations that arise from the text. Each student performs this task twice; each one is due the Friday before class at noon. Students will have opportunity at the start of the course to choose which two weeks they prefer, (however, they cannot overlap with the week chosen for assignment #1).

Instructions regarding the summary: Although this assignment is short, it requires you have read the text carefully, determined the thesis, what issue or issues are at stake, the method deployed or approach taken, and have understood the argument. Your paragraph should begin by identifying the thesis. If you pinpoint a single sentence that you determine is the thesis, you may cite it (though this is not necessary), but you should also translate it into your own words. Other than a thesis statement, there should be no other direct quotations. (Consider a book or movie review—the reviewer doesn't spend time citing passages from the book or lines from the film. She provides the reader a brief account of what the book is about; after that, she usually offers an analysis or her "take" on the book.) Your task is to provide the essence of what the author has said. You should *not* offer a critique or response--that will happen in Assignment #3. The purpose of this assignment is to practice being a thoughtful and generous reader.

Instructions regarding the questions or observations: *They must be specific to text.*

Here is an example of an appropriate question:

What is driving Augustine's concern about figural language in the Bible, and why did he think it necessary to articulate a theory of semiotics as a precursor to offering guidelines for appropriate biblical interpretation?

Here is an example of an inappropriate question:

"Since the great Augustine gave such thought to figural language in the Bible, shouldn't we pay more attention to the role of metaphor when we read the Bible today?"

The latter question is certainly worthwhile, and concerns such as these will likely come up in class discussion. But the purpose of this assignment is to learn how to be an active, engaged, and generous reader. Many of the readings not only come from times and places far removed from our own, but they delve into complicated matters related to epistemology, hermeneutics, linguistics, and theology, and they require careful attention and reflection. If we are going to use the writings of great figures who influenced Christian theology to inform how modern Christians (and others) think about biblical authority, it is important to insure one first has a good grasp of the sources upon which one claims to be drawing.

This assignment—including the questions—should not be more than one page. Students will not be asked to make a presentation in class but should be prepared to make use of what they wrote as part of class discussion.

Due just before the class in which we discuss the author.

Weight: 15% for each

Assignment #3: Short Paper

Write a 5 page paper in which you compare and contrast the views of biblical interpretation and authority in two authors of your choice. You may build on author(s) whose texts you summarized in Assignment #2, but you are not tied to them. You should keep in mind this paper is asking you to write on a *pair* of texts, so the pairing needs to make sense in such a way that you can write a coherent argument. (It is likely that you will be able to use one of your authors from assignment #2 but not both.) Not every author addresses the Bible directly, but in every case you should be able to surmise what use they would make of the Bible, and/or how their ideas influenced ideas about the status and authority of the Bible. Your goal is not merely to list similarities and differences that you notice. Your goal is to make a single argument that addresses the underlying principles that led each author to his or her way of using the Bible. The texts may or may not state these principles explicitly; it is nevertheless your job to find and articulate them. Some of the ways to approach this paper are through questions of comparison or their intertextual relationship. How are they similar or different? Did they influence one another? How did different circumstances affect their view of the Bible? How might one have set the stage for another to develop a new way of viewing the Bible?

Criteria for Evaluation: Final papers will be graded according to the following 4 criteria: 1. A clearly stated claim; 2. Textual evidence to support the claim; 3. Quality of writing (organization, proper use of sentences and paragraphs, grammar, spelling, and all other mechanics); 4. Depth and seriousness of analysis. In a short paper the claim typically appears as the last sentence of the introductory paragraph (if it is not there the writer needs clearly to mark where it is, since otherwise readers will assume that sentence is the claim). A claim states the conclusion of the argument put forward in the paper. You have a great deal of freedom here. A claim might state what is the most important idea in the readings, or what the most important similarity or difference is, or what the author must assume to make his or her argument, or what the logical extension of that argument might be, etc. In a short paper you will likely not be able to summarize all the points the authors make, nor should you try. Part of your task of analysis is to prioritize what is most important. But you are responsible for insuring a good grasp of the argument, and this should include an appreciation for what the author is trying to communicate and why it matters. Your paper will not follow the same organization as the readings under analysis, since the logic of your argument will not be the same as the logic of the arguments of the readings. If your paragraphs tend to begin “And then . . .; Next . . .” then it is probably time to go back and do at least one more draft and re-think what you are presenting and how.

The purpose of the paper is three-fold: the first is to encourage deep engagement with the texts; the second is to encourage a habit of discussion that is open, respectful, and rigorous. This is best accomplished when the analytical essays take a charitable stance towards the readings. Some of them will seem old-fashioned, and the writers may have different concerns than do we. As in any good conversation, it is important first to try to see where the writer is coming from, rather than to be dismissive of his or her ideas. There will be plenty of time later to decide what is useful to you and what is not. We must begin with an accurate understanding of what is going on in the essay. Third, these section papers will help develop your skills as readers and writers.

Due: last day of class.

Weight toward grade: 40%

N.B. Participation is 20% of your grade.

POLICIES AND SERVICES

Incompletes: If incompletes are allowed in this course, see the Master's Student Handbook for Policies and Procedures.

Pass/Fail: Masters students wishing to take the class pass/fail should discuss this with the instructor by the second class session.

Academic Integrity and Community Covenant: All students are expected to abide by Iliff's statement on Academic Integrity, as published in the Masters Student Handbook, or the Joint PhD Statement on Academic Honesty, as published in the Joint PhD Student Handbook, as appropriate. All participants in this class are expected to be familiar with Iliff's Community Covenant.

Accommodations: Iliff engages in a collaborative effort with students with disabilities to reasonably accommodate student needs. Students are encouraged to contact their assigned advisor to initiate the process of requesting accommodations. The advising center can be contacted at advising@iliff.edu or by phone at 303-765-1146.

Writing Lab: Grammar and organization are important for all written assignments. Additional help is available from the Iliff Writing Lab, which is available for students of any level who need help beginning an assignment, organizing thoughts, or reviewing a final draft.

Inclusive Language: It is expected that all course participants will use inclusive language in speaking and writing, and terms that do not create barriers to classroom community.