

Course Syllabus
[DRAFT]
KNB3930HS – Biblical Hermeneutics and the Meaning of Meaning

Knox College
Toronto School of Theology
Winter 2020

1. Instructor Information

Instructor: Bradley McLean, PhD, Full Professor
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Office Hours: by appointment (through Zoom)

2. Course Identification

Course Number: KNB 3930HS
Course Format: Seminar
Course Name: Biblical Hermeneutics and the Meaning of Meaning
Course Location: Knox College
Class Times: Mondays 9:10-11:00
Prerequisites: none

3. Course Description

The term ‘hermeneutics’ is an ancient, pre-philosophical Greek term concerned with the question of what it means to interpret any thing, person or event. With respect to interpreting biblical texts, hermeneutical theories construct, in different ways, the author, the reader, the nature of the text, and the relation of the text to the original context and the contemporary world. The purpose of this course is to provide students with the opportunity to explore the hermeneutic theories of Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas, Ricoeur, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari. This interdisciplinary course integrates aspects of biblical interpretation with philosophical traditions.

Seminar. Class participation, reflection papers, assignments, short research paper.

Note: As a result of public health events requiring physical distancing, this course is offered using a remote delivery method. In this circumstance, the course outcomes and requirements will remain unchanged, but some accommodations may be made in the areas of content delivery and the manner of assessment. This format will require a computer with a webcam and microphone as well as access to high speed internet. If you have questions about what remote delivery might mean for you, please feel free to contact the course instructor or the Knox College registrar.

4. Required Textbook

B. H. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation and Philosophical Hermeneutics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

- All other assigned readings will be distributed through Quercus.

Optional

William B. Badke, *Beyond the Answer Sheet: A Cultural Guide to Students who Come from Outside North America. Academic Success for International Students* (New York: Universe Inc., 2003).

5. Course Learning Objectives/Outcomes

BASIC DEGREE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS	CORRESPONDING COURSE GOALS AND OUTCOMES	CORRESPONDING COURSE ELEMENTS / ASSIGNMENTS
EXPECTATIONS: <i>In this course students are expected to demonstrate the following:</i>		
1. Level of Application of Knowledge is defined as the ability to produce thoughtful and critical analysis within the context of a seminar.	At a basic level: 1) Demonstrate familiarity with assigned readings; 2) Use appropriate use of relevant terminology; 3) Communicate clearly and reasonably (i.e., your statements are supported by appropriate textual references, and explicit reasoning and not merely assertions)	Question & Observation Papers Assignments
2. Level of Communication Skills is defined as clear and effective communication in both oral and written forms; the construction of logical arguments; the making of informed judgments on complex issues; and facility	Demonstrate a basic ability to: 1) relate new knowledge to previously studied ideas and concepts; 2) compare and contrast concepts hermeneutic theories;	Question & Observation Papers Assignments

BASIC DEGREE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS	CORRESPONDING COURSE GOALS AND OUTCOMES	CORRESPONDING COURSE ELEMENTS / ASSIGNMENTS
with standard conventions of style for scholarly writing.	3) speculate about implications of a particular theory for textual interpretation.	
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to engage in self-directed research topic, to analyze evidence, and produce analysis of source documents, using good organizational and proper research formats.	Discuss the interactions between contemporary cultural contexts and the interpretation of Scripture.	<i>Short Research Essay:</i> Each student will submit a final research paper based on his/her seminar presentation (10 pages). This paper is due on the last day of class.

6. Evaluation

The final grade for the course will be based on evaluations in four areas:

1) Class participation (20%): Active participation requires that each student be ready to articulate and support his or her own ideas and to respectfully engage the ideas of others.

2) Assignments (40%): Each student will complete 4 short assignments.

3) Question & Observation Papers (Q&O) (20%): Each student will submit 5 Q&O papers (1/2 page in length) listing: 1) One significant question based on the assigned readings; 2) One significant observation based on the assigned readings; 3) A list of any significant terminology that requires clarification in class.

4) Short Research Essay (40%): Each student will submit a short essay (6 pages).

- *Please submit all your written work through Quercus.*

7. Week by week schedule

Unit 1

14 September *The changing shape of hermeneutics in the twentieth century*

Unit 2

21 September *The Crisis of Historicism*

Required Reading

- B. H. McLean, "The Crisis of Historicism and the Problem of Historical Meaning in New Testament Studies," *Heythrop Journal* (2009): 1-35.

Homework

- Submit Q&O 1 (due 21 September)

Unit 3

28 September *Martin Heidegger: Existentialism and Interpretation*

Required Reading

- B. H. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 99-142.

Homework

- Assignment 1: Martin Heidegger (due 5 October)

Unit 4

5 October *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Interpretation as Dialogue*

Required Reading

- McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 175-198

Recommended Reading

- Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem," in David E. Linge (ed.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University California Press, 1976), 3-17.

Homework

- Submit Q&O 2 (due 5 October)

12 October - Thanksgiving

Unit 5

19 October *Jürgen Habermas and his Debate with Gadamer*

Required Reading

- McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 199-226.

Recommended Reading

- Jürgen Habermas, “What is Universal Pragmatics?” in *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 1, 26-65.

Homework

- Submit Q&O 3 (due 19 October)

[26-30 October – Reading Week]

Unit 6

2 November

Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Hope and Suspicion

Required Reading

- McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 227-246.

Recommended Reading

- Paul Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology,” *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 63-100.

Homework

- Short Essay (due 23 November)

Unit 7

9 November

Ferdinand de Saussure

Required Reading

- McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 11-34, 157-171.
- Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (Oxford: Duckworth, 1976), 65-70, 110-25.

Homework

- Assignment 2: Saussure’s linguistic theory (due 16 November)

Unit 8

16 November

Jacques Derrida

Required Reading

- Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 278-93.

Homework

- Assignment 3: Jacques Derrida (due 23 November)

Unit 9

November 23 Michel Foucault, What is an Author?

Required Reading

- Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in Ed. Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-memory, Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113-38.

Homework

- Assignment 4: Michel Foucault (due 30 November)

Unit 10

30 November The Role of the Interpreter in the Act of Interpretation

Required Reading

- Judith Butler, "Giving an Account of Oneself," *Diacritics* 31.4 (2001), 22-40.

Homework

- Submit Q&O 4 (due 30 December)

Unit 11

7 December The Exteriority of the Biblical Text

Required Reading

- McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 268-301.

Recommended Reading

- Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: Univ. Minnesota Press, 1987), 3-25.

Homework

- Submit Q&O 5 (due 7 December)

Unit 12

14 December Where have we been? Where shall we go?

8. Class participation

- You should read the assigned readings carefully before class (on Zoom). Be ready to explain your ideas and listen and respond to the ideas of others.
- Active participation requires that each student be ready to articulate and support his or her own ideas and to respectfully engage the ideas of others in group discussion.
- Your participation grade for will reflect the extent to which you make relevant, informed, thoughtful and clear contributions to the discussions.

9. Grading Rubric for Assignments and Short Research Essay

a) Cogency (the insight and vitality of the concepts underlying the paper's argument or analysis)

- Strong: the assignment's argument or analysis is insightful and potentially compelling.
- Acceptable: the assignment's argument or analysis is plausible, clear and consistent.
- Weak: the assignment's argument or analysis is implausible, unclear, incomplete, or inconsistent.

b) Support (the extent to which the assignment's assertions are supported with examples, evidence, or reasoning which are appropriate)

- Strong: the assignment's argument or analysis receives full support.
- Acceptable: the assignment's argument or analysis receives credible support.
- Weak: the assignment's argument or analysis receives inadequate, unconvincing, or irrelevant support.

c) Control (the organizational qualify of the assignment, both in terms of its overall structure and of its individual paragraphs)

- Strong: the assignment is well-structured; its form at all levels contributes to its purpose.
- Acceptable: the assignment is generally well-structured, with few flaws in its overall organization or its paragraphing,
- Weak: the assignment is poorly structured; organizational flaws undermine its effectiveness.

d) Addressing the issues (the extent to which the paper explores the issues set forth in the assignment)

- Strong: the assignment addresses the assignment in depth, thoroughly exploring the complexities of the issue(s).
- Acceptable: the assignment addresses the assignment and recognizes the complexities of the issue(s).
- Weak: the assignment treats the assignment in a superficial, simplistic, or disjointed manner.

e) Style (the effectiveness of the assignment's sentence-structure, word choice, and fluency)

- Strong: the sentence-structure, word-choice, fluency, and tone of the paper enhance its effectiveness and reinforce its purpose.

- Acceptable: the sentence-structure, word-choice, fluency, and tone of the paper contribute to its effectiveness and adequately support its purpose.
- Weak: the sentence-structure, word-choice, fluency, and tone of the paper detract from its effectiveness or are inappropriate to its purpose.

f) *Grammar* (the quality of the paper at the surface-level: syntax, grammar, spelling, and punctuation)

- Strong: The assignment is nearly impeccable in its syntax, grammar, spelling, punctuation and format.
- Acceptable: sentence-level errors do not seriously detract from the assignment's effectiveness.
- Weak: Sentence-level errors are so frequent and disruptive as to detract from the assignment's effectiveness.

10. Question and Observation Papers

a) The purpose of these Q&O papers is to:

1. attempt to clarify a key idea and or term;
2. seek to relate new knowledge to previously studied ideas and concepts;
3. attempt to compare and contrast concepts or hermeneutic theories
4. speculate about implications of a particular theory for textual interpretation.

b) Each 'question & observation' paper should include the following:

1. One significant question you have about the assigned readings;
2. One (brief) significant observation that you have about the assigned readings;
3. A list of significant terminology and vocabulary you do not understand.

Submit your 'Question & Observation' papers through Quercus.

c) *Grading Rubric for Question & Observation' papers*

- familiarity with required *and recommended* readings
- thoughtful and relevant contributions
- appropriate use of relevant vocabulary
- clarity and reasonableness

11. Short Research Essay

a) *Length:* 6 pages in total maximum, exclusive of title page and bibliography.

b) *Requirements:*

1. Your essay should be typed, double-spaced, with 12 point font size and reasonable (1") margins.
2. Select a biblical passage from the New Testament or Tanakh, whose history of interpretation has been, or could be, connected with an important ethical issue, or justice issue, either negatively or positively (e.g., issues of oppression, persecution, exploitation of some persons or group, whether connected with religious belief, gender, economics, etc.).
3. Using your biblical passage to illustrate the debate between Gadamer, Habermas, especially including the intervention of Ricoeur.

In your research paper, do not forget to:

1. Analyze your chosen biblical text on the basis of your informed understanding of these hermeneutic theories. In other words, you are not being asked simply to exegete a biblical text, or to react negatively, or positively, to these hermeneutic perspectives.
2. Make appropriate use of key terminology and concepts (e.g., historically-effected consciousness, universal pragmatics, hermeneutics of suspicion). Use direct quotes from the assigned readings wherever possible.
3. Before handing in your paper, re-read it in order to assure that you have used your biblical text throughout the essay. Your essay should not simply repeat course lecture material.

12. Course Policies

a) Accessibility

Students with a disability or health consideration, whether temporary or permanent, are entitled to accommodation. Students in conjoint degree programs must register at the University of Toronto's Accessibility Services offices; information is available at <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/>. The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

b) Course grades

Consistently with the policy of the University of Toronto, course grades submitted by an instructor are reviewed by a committee of the instructor's college before being posted. Course grades may be adjusted where they do not comply with University grading policy (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/grading.htm>) or college grading policy.

c) Plagiarism

Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes or endnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to his or her head of college or delegate according to the TST *Basic Degree Handbook*. A student who plagiarizes in this course will be assumed to have read the document "Avoidance of

plagiarism in theological writing” published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges.

<https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/policies-guidelines/academic-integrity-resources/>

<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/grading-practices-policy-university-assessment-and-january-1-2020>

<https://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/library/research/theology/avoiding-plagiarism-in-theological-writing/>

d) Other academic offences

TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto Code of *Behaviour on Academic Matters* <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>.

e) Obligation to check email

At times, the course instructor may decide to send out important course information by email. To that end, all students in conjoint programs are required to have a valid utoronto email address. Students must have set up their utoronto email address which is entered in the ACORN system. Information is available at www.utorid.utoronto.ca. The course instructor will not be able to help you with this. 416-978-HELP and the Help Desk at the Information Commons can answer questions you may have about your UTORid and password. *Students should check utoronto email regularly* for messages about the course. Forwarding your utoronto.ca email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from utoronto.ca addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from your course instructor may end up in your spam or junk mail folder. Students in non-conjoint programs should contact the Registrar of their college of registration.

f) Email communication with the course instructor

The instructor aims to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. *All email communications from students in conjoint programs should be sent from a utoronto email address*. Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also the instructor cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. The instructor is not obliged to respond to email from non-utoronto addresses for students in conjoint programs. Students in non-conjoint programs should only use the email address they have provided to their college of registration.

g) Penalties for late submission:

Course work which is handed in late will be penalized according to the following schedule: 2% off per day for up to 3 days (i.e., up to 6%); thereafter, 3% off per day, cumulatively.

h) Completion of BD Course work:

All course work (including any late work) must be completed by the end of term, the last day of exams. Only in the case of illness (with a note from a doctor), bereavement or other unusual circumstances will an extension be considered and this must be authorized by the Basic Degree Committee and the Faculty.