

BRIERCREST

BLST/THEO 805 Scripture and Theological Interpretation Spring 2018

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Course Dates: May 14-18, 2018

3 Credit Hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines what it means to confess that scripture is the Word of God and is authoritative in all matters of faith and life. Through advanced study in the doctrine of scripture and its theological interpretation, students are exposed to the most influential schools of thought in contemporary theology.

COURSE INTEGRATION

The Bible is a crucial focus of study in both the church and the academy. However, under the influence of the Enlightenment, the way the academy has understood the nature of Scripture and the task of its interpretation has changed dramatically from the understanding and interpretive practice that has characterized the church for most of its history. Often students encounter a vast, unbridged divide between the approaches to Scripture advocated respectively in the modern academy and the church. This course is a guided conversational forum to develop habits of thinking and speaking about the nature, purpose and reading of Holy Scripture as the Word of God which occupies a central and indispensable place in the self-communicative action of the Triune God of Christian faith. We will reflect upon the doctrine of Scripture in light of the burgeoning volume of recent literature advocating a return to a Theological Interpretation of Scripture, as often illustrated by the best of the pre-Modern biblical interpreters of the Christian church. We will inquire into the best practices of the interpretation of Scripture which have shaped the dogmatic development of the ecumenical creeds and other significant theological formulations of the church, while attempting to discern how Modern methodologies have come up short. Our purpose is to affirm that the Bible is the book of the church, and to re-instill confidence in the church's historic method of reading the Bible as the most appropriate, faithful and promising one.

COURSE TEXTS

The following textbooks must be purchased. They are available through the Bookstore. The primary readings are taken from these texts. Additional readings from the reserved shelf of the library or the internet (as noted on the assignments pages) may be required.

Carter, Craig A. *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018.

[This text will not be published in time for this course, however, arrangements have been made for advanced copies to be available in some form. Every effort will be made to ensure that special instructions for the purchase, use and disposal of these copies will be provided at least one month prior to the first class.]

Leithart, Peter J. *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009.

Ward, Timothy. *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009.

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

Billings, J. Todd. *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.

Boersma, Hans. *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.

Levering, Matthew. *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2008.

Swain, Scott R. *Trinity, Revelation and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and its Interpretation*. London: T & T Clark, 2011.

Treier, Daniel T. *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recognizing a Christian Practice*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Webster, John B. *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Students are expected to refer Briercrest Seminary's Format and Style Guides and Guide for Writing Research Papers, available as PDF documents here: <http://briercrest.ca/current/seminary/academics/important-documents/>.

These texts are available in store and online at the Briercrest Bookstore: <http://briercrest.ca/bookstore>.

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on Canvas (<https://briercrest.instructure.com>; cf. <http://briercrest.ca/online/canvas>) and their myBriercrest.ca email account.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

It is my prayer that students who successfully complete this course will:

1. Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the biblical, historical and theological underpinnings of the primary Christian traditions concerning the nature, role and character of Holy Scripture.
2. Articulate a basic understanding of the essential terms and themes related to the Christian doctrine of Holy Scripture, including its inspiration, authority, infallibility, preservation, sufficiency, perspicuity, perfection and place in the economy of grace.

3. Exhibit an awareness of the major theological voices and movements making an impact in the field in recent times, including the rise of critical approaches to the reading of Scripture and the re-appropriation of pre-critical theological approaches to the reading of Holy Scripture.
4. Apply enhanced research, critical thinking and writing skills in the particular disciplines unique to faithful Christian academic theology.
5. Engage the Bible and theology meaningfully for personal spiritual formation, the mission of the church and Christian witness in the world today.

COURSE OUTLINE AND CONTENT

Note: This course will take the form of a reading intensive interchange, consisting of a series of “agenda setting” lectures by the instructor and student-led theological discussions, based upon course readings and reflections. Thus, the success of the course will depend greatly on students coming to class having read carefully and thoroughly the assigned textbooks before the course begins. The topics listed below are suggestive starting points. Actual discussion will vary on the basis of students’ “discussion papers” (see pre-course assignments). The outline below is subject to change depending on the number of students enrolled. (Sections may be further subdivided to accommodate the number of students presenting.)

Date	Topic	Student Presentation
May 14 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction/Syllabus • Introduction to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture (Lecture) • Treier, <i>ITIS</i>, Chapters 1, 5 • Webster, <i>HS</i>, Chapters 1-2 	
May 14 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the Doctrine of Scripture (Lecture) • Webster, <i>HS</i>, Chapters 3-4 	Discussion Papers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ward, <i>WL</i>, Chapters 1-2 2. Ward, <i>WL</i>, Chapters 3-4
May 15 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Scripture with the Great Tradition 	Discussion Papers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Carter, <i>ISGT</i>, Preface and Chapters 1-2 4. Carter, <i>ISGT</i>, Chapter 3
May 15 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Scripture and the History of Biblical Interpretation 	Discussion Papers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Leithart, <i>DE</i>, Chapters 1-2 6. Carter, <i>ISGT</i>, Chapter 4
May 16 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Scripture as a Unity • Reading Scripture and the Literal Sense 	Discussion Papers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Carter, <i>ISGT</i>, Chapters 5-6
May 16 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Scripture and Layers of Meaning 	Discussion Papers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Leithart, <i>DE</i>, Chapters 3-4.
May 17 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Scripture with Christ 	Discussion Papers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Carter, <i>ISGT</i>, Chapter 7

May 17 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Scripture with Christ 	Discussion Papers: 10. Leithart, <i>DE</i> , Chapters 5-6
May 18 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading and Preaching Scripture 	Discussion Papers: 11. Carter, <i>ISGT</i> , Chapter 8 12. Ward, <i>WL</i> , Chapter 5-6

ASSIGNMENTS

Pre-Course Assignments:

1. **Readings and Discussion Participation (10% Due May 14):** The following readings should be completed before the beginning of class: Carter, Leithart, and Ward (approx. 600 pages). These materials will form the essential content for lectures and class discussions. Students will be expected to participate actively by contributing thoughtfully to the discussions. Students will be required to indicate that all assigned readings have been completed by the beginning of class **Monday, May 14**. (Learning outcomes 1, 2 and 3)

2. **Argument Précis (15% Due May 14):** Students will write a 1500 word double-spaced synopsis of the main argument of Craig Carter's *Reading Scripture with the Great Tradition*. The goal is *not* to summarize each aspect of Carter's work, but to identify clearly and succinctly his overall view of the subject matter, the key supporting arguments he employs to defend his position, and the large scale constructive proposal he offers. That is, according to Carter, what is the state of the question as regards the doctrine of Holy Scripture? What are the options for the advance of theology? What significant proposal(s) does Carter make in this regard and why? Do you find them compelling? Why or why not? References to Carter's work can be made in parentheses within the essay. A significant amount of class time will involve open discussion of Carter's work. This assignment is to be completed by the beginning of class **Monday, May 14**. (Learning outcomes 1, 2 and 3)

3. **Overview of the Doctrine of Scripture (15% Due May 14):** Using Timothy Ward as a guide, students will prepare a balanced 1500 word biblical and theological overview of the doctrine of Scripture, accounting for the essential historic teachings of the Christian church on the nature, place and function of Christian Scripture. This is to be something of an extended contemporary statement of faith on the nature and function of Holy Scripture as traditionally understood by the church. This overview is to be as comprehensive and precise as you can be. Be sure to incorporate Scriptural references (not included in the word count) to support your claims. This assignment is to be completed by the beginning of class **Monday, May 14**. (Learning outcomes 1, 2 and 3)

Mid-Course Assignments:

4. **Discussion Papers (2 X 10%).** Each morning or afternoon session at least one student will be responsible to summarize, critique and lead a class discussion on the readings assigned for that session. Your presentation must include: i) a ten minute oral presentation introducing the major ideas and arguments propounded in the readings; ii) a two page (single spaced, printed and distributed to each class member) critical summary of the key themes arising from the material; and

iii) a facilitated discussion by means of questions and observations designed to guide the class progressively through the material (with the assistance of the instructor and the participation of class mates). Think of your discussion presentation along the lines of a "script" for a provocative or interesting interchange on the most important issues arising from the readings. Excellent discussion papers will be clear, informative, concise, creative, accurate (representing the material well), and worthy of debate! (Learning outcomes 1-4)

There will be time periods designated (as per the outline above) to present and discuss your reading critiques. The sections for which you can sign up are as follows:

1. Ward, *WL*, Chapters 1-2
2. Ward, *WL*, Chapters 3-4
3. Carter, *ISGT*, Preface and Chapters 1-2
4. Carter, *ISGT*, Chapter 3
5. Leithart, *DE*, Chapters 1-2
6. Carter, *ISGT*, Chapter 4
7. Carter, *ISGT*, Chapters 5-6
8. Leithart, *DE*, Chapters 3-4
9. Carter, *ISGT*, Chapter 7
10. Leithart, *DE*, Chapter 5-6
11. Carter, *ISGT*, Chapter 8
12. Ward, *WL*, Chapters 5-6

VERY IMPORTANT: Beginning on April 9, 2018 and no later than April 30, 2018, please email the instructor (via Canvas) indicating your top four choices for which book portion on which you wish to present to the class. The instructor will attempt to give each student's first and second choice, but no guarantee can be made that you will receive your first choice, or your preferred texts. Sign-ups will be on a "first come, first served" basis. The instructor reserves the right to reassign your choices.

Prepare enough copies for each person in the class. This must be handed in as a hard copy (i.e., no emailed copies accepted for this assignment).

Evaluation: Because these are meant to be papers designed to get the class talking about theological issues raised in the course texts, the marking will emphasize the effectiveness of the *presentation* and not just its written quality. Thus 75% of the grade per paper will be on the presentation and guided class discussion, while 25% of the grade will be on the written paper itself. Consequently, it is just as important to think about *how* you are going to foster discussion as it is *what* you are going to present.

Due Dates: Discussion Papers will be due at the beginning of the class for which they are assigned.

Post-Course Assignment:

5. **Major Comparative Research Essay (40% Due July 13):** Each student will prepare a comparison of at least four distinct biblical commentaries on a particular passage of Scripture. Students will select one of the following passages of Scripture: Genesis 1:26-28; Exodus 3:13-22; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; John 1:1-18; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Hebrews 1:1-13. Students will examine at

least one exemplary commentary from each of the following periods: Ancient (significant church father, e.g. Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine), Medieval (eg., Anselm, Abelard, Peter Lombard, Aquinas), Reformation (e.g., Calvin or Luther), Modern (a major 19th or 20th century critical commentary, e.g. Anchor Bible Commentary, Hermeneia, International Critical Commentary, New International Commentary, Old Testament Library, Word Biblical Commentary, etc.). The purpose of this comparison is not to exegete the passage per se, but to compare, contrast and evaluate the interest, approach, style and content of each commentator as they reflect a larger class and era of biblical commentary as discussed in class. Drawing upon the key issues brought forward in class readings, lectures and discussions, students must critically analyze the contribution of their chosen commentators, demonstrating keen insight into the value of these resources for the task of the interpretation of Scripture as the Word of God. This is a summary exercise in which awareness of the entire course content is to be brought to bear upon a critical evaluation of the work of each biblical interpreter. Knowledge of the characteristic approach of each interpreter and the specific handling of your chosen passage is to be demonstrated. The paper will serve to highlight and evaluate the distinctiveness of pre-Modern as opposed to Modern interpretation of Scripture. It should reflect something of the character of a dialogue in your thinking between the issues raised in class and the reality of Scriptural interpretation as practiced by your chosen exemplars. A helpful illustration of this kind of analysis is to be found in Carter's comparison of three commentaries by Goldingay and Payne, Motyer, and Childs (Carter, *ISGT*, Chapter 8). Students must secure in advance the permission of the instructor for the particular Scripture passages and primary commentaries/sources to be referenced.

Papers should be a maximum of 15 pages (4500 words) and must adhere to Briercrest Seminary Format guidelines (available online at the Briercrest Seminary website). Excellent papers are those that demonstrate evidence of significant research, close and sympathetic reading, keen critical insight, sound theological judgment, and clear and cohesive argumentation, exercised in service of the mission of the church. This assignment is to be completed by **Friday, July 13**. (Learning outcomes 4 and 5)

SEMINARY CALENDAR

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest Seminary, all of which are published in the current Seminary Calendar:

<http://briercrest.ca/current/seminary/academics/seminary-calendar/>.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend 100% of each modular they register for. If this is impossible, arrangements must be made with the course professor. A maximum of 1 full day of class can be foregone. Students should request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit if additional time is missed.

Course Schedules

Classes begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning and run a minimum of 30 hours through the course of the week. The schedule is determined by the course professor. Students should check the syllabus for specifics. When the syllabus does not state class times, students are responsible to check with the professor prior to making travel plans.

Assignment Submission

All assignments must be submitted no later than eight weeks after the last day of class as stated in the syllabus. The correct due dates will be clearly noted in the syllabus and each faculty member will state in their syllabus how assignments should be submitted. Assignments submitted within a week after the due date will be accepted with a 10 per cent penalty. For additional information refer to the late assignment policy or the extension policy in the [academic calendar](#).

Return of Graded Assignments

Professors are expected to return graded assignments within six weeks of the due date. If they fail to do so, students may submit an inquiry to the [Seminary](#). If an extension is granted, the professor is no longer obligated to meet this deadline.

Academic Honesty

Students are accountable to perform each task according to principles of academic honesty. Please refer to pages 25-26 in the [academic calendar](#) for more information.

Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or illness who may need academic accommodations should discuss them with the course instructor after contacting the Student Success Centre in person (Room #215), by telephone (1-306-756-3230) or by email (studentsuccesscentre@briercrest.ca).

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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