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& Weds by appointment only

FSP161 (SECT H9, H5): AMERICA'S BESTSELLING BOOK – THE BIBLE (HONORS)

Fall 2017

Section H9 (TuFr 2-3:20pm): SSB324

Section H5 (TuFr 3:30-4:50pm): SSB324

Course Description & Learning Goals

“It is consistently America's bestselling book: the Bible. No book has more profoundly shaped American history, and no book is held in wider esteem by Americans, generation after generation. But what's inside this hallowed volume? One will find compelling narratives, stirring words, ghastly events, and tawdry encounters, which have seeded 1000s of faith traditions and nurtured billions of believers. This seminar will sample each of the Bible's genres, examine the contexts and uses of select texts, and trace out the Bible's influence on American history, literature, politics, and religion.”

This seminar is about improving one's ability to read, write, and speak analytically, to discuss religious issues civilly, and to understand the worlds and lives of others. This is not, therefore, a survey course on the Bible (that would require a different professor and different texts), but rather a co-exploration of biblical texts, genres, and interpretive paradigms, and of the Bible's influence in American culture. Successful students will learn to read with an eye toward claims, evidence, coherence, and presumptions; bracket (initially) questions of truth, morality, and theology; understand what the Bible means to those who have made it a bestseller; and become aware of how history and one's own biography have combined to locate oneself with respect to our seminar's focus.

Required Texts:

Ben Witherington III (BWIII). *Reading and Understanding the Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Marcus J. Borg (MJB). *Reading the Bible Again For the First Time*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Holy Bible (HB): New Revised Standard Version. New York: American Bible Society, 1997.

(This will be the official translation used in this seminar.)

Additional readings from Hatch & Noll's (eds) *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (Oxford 1982), Fea's *The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society* (Oxford 2016), and Goff, Farnsley & Thuesen's *The Bible in American Life* (BiAL; Oxford 2016), along with select essays, posted as pdfs on Canvas.

Course Policies:

1. *Attendance, Participation, and Behavioral Expectations*: Students demonstrate their commitment to learning by regularly attending class, by arriving *on time* and *staying for the full class period*, by contributing usefully to class and small group discussions, by doing their part to create an atmosphere of respectful and serious learning, and by reading the assigned material in advance of the class. You will be

expected to so express your commitment in this class, and will receive a tentative participation grade at several points during the semester. Please note, this is a prepared *participation* grade: perfect attendance with no participation receives a participation grade of D.

Students will also be expected to behave as adults in class. This includes: a.) cell phones turned off and put out of sight for the entirety of the class period (i.e., no texting), b.) laptops used for class purposes only, c.) body needs managed to avoid mid-class disruptions, d.) no side conversations or other disruptive behavior, e.) relevant textbooks brought to class, and f.) students prepared to take notes and participate fully in the learning process. Violation of these expectations will lower your participation grade. Repeated violation will lower your participation grade substantially and result in a formal complaint against the student filed with the Dean of Students.

2. *Papers and Exams*: Students demonstrate their academic seriousness by turning in all papers and assignments on time, and by writing with excellence. This includes (but is not limited to) spelling, grammar, style (i.e., use the active voice, avoid wordiness/clutter, write for clarity), documentation, and format (thus, any written assignment should be formatted with double line spacing, 1 inch margins, and a 12 point typeface). Dedicated students for whom this presents a challenge will avail themselves of the college's writing tutors.

a. *All assignments must be turned in on time*. Overwork, personal struggles, and the like are important issues, and I encourage you to avail yourselves of your residence staff, student development staff, or the college's counselors for help in these matters. Such issues, however, do not constitute a valid excuse for lateness. Neither do variations on "the computer ate my writing assignment," "I don't know how the file I uploaded didn't have any text in it," or "I e-mailed my paper to you, did you get it?" count as valid excuses. Valid excuses are a death in the immediate family or severe hardship (which I will confirm with the Dean of Students). Late papers are *severely* penalized (i.e., 5 points for papers not uploaded by *the start of class*, 10 points for papers uploaded after class, 15 points the following day, etc.). Papers and assignments must be uploaded on time.

b. *Quizzes should be taken during class time*. Only those with official TCNJ activities (e.g., field trips), or the valid reasons specified above, may reschedule their quizzes. No make-up quizzes will be given to students who miss class and notify the professor *after* class has occurred, unless they were incapacitated and physically unable to communicate beforehand (i.e., unconscious in a hospital). Make-up quiz format is at my discretion (usually a 10 minute oral quiz).

c. *Plagiarism/Cheating* will not be tolerated, and I will advocate for the fullest penalties possible. Don't be foolish--you don't want me as your adversary. I have respect for the student who accepts the consequences of poor preparation and turns in his/her *own* work. Do what is honorable and right.

3. *Grading Distribution*: Your course grade will be based on the following percentages:

Quizzes	15%
Shiloh Report	10%
Resonance Essay	15%
Bible Reader Profile	15%
Borg & Witherington Seminar Transcript	20%
Class Presentation	10%
Prepared Participation	<u>15%</u>
TOTAL	100%

Grade distribution is the traditional 0 to 100 point scale: 93-100=A, 90-92=A-, 87-89=B+, 83-86=B, 80-82=B-, 77-79=C+, 73-76=C, 70-72=C-, 67-69=D+, 60-66=D, less than 60=F.

Student Requirements:

1. *Quizzes*: Will occur weekly, as a general rule, and focus on the assigned reading for that week (but may include items from previous reading material). The quizzes will be comprised of true/false items or essay questions.
2. *Prepared Class Participation*: There will be a variety of ways that we'll be learning together in this class. Your considerate and prepared (that means having the reading done in advance) contribution to class and small group discussion is an essential part of our learning. Keep in mind, I'm not going to be evaluating the sheer *volume* of words that you share with your classmates, but rather the *substance* of what you share. Naturally, those who participate regularly and thoughtfully will receive the highest evaluations in this area. See also the discussion of behavioral expectations above.
3. *Writing Assignments*: You will write four papers for this course, which you will submit digitally to Canvas by the date specified. For 1 of the first 3 papers, you will also give a 5-minute, extemporaneous class presentation.

a) *Report: Why Shiloh?*

Purpose: observe everything you can during our visit to Shiloh Baptist Church, and talk to the church members seated around you, to try to understand what this experience means to those who participate in it regularly

Audience & Format: write a letter to your favorite K-12 teacher, summarizing your observations, conversations, and reflections on what this experience seems to mean to members of the church. Be sure to explain why you thought this teacher would be interested in your field trip; maximum of 1200 words

Intriguing Problem: Except for some children, no one in the USA is required to attend church. So why do the folks at Shiloh Baptist Church – a Bible-believing church – do so?

b) *Profile of a Contemporary Bible Reader*

Purpose: interview a regular Bible reader (i.e., someone who reads the Bible daily or as close to daily as s/he can), and write an article about this interview for the campus newspaper, the Signal

Audience & Format: write for public college students, in the form of a newspaper article: who, what, where, when, and why; maximum of 1200 words

Intriguing Problem: why do some contemporary Americans read the Bible regularly? What does this practice do for them?

c) *Resonance Essay*

Purpose: choose a Bible story (i.e., a passage that has a character and a story line) and explain, to someone who is NOT a Bible reader, why the selected story resonates with you (i.e., engages or enrages you), and why stories like the one you selected can have such a powerful impact today

Audience & Format: write as a letter to a college-educated friend or relative; maximum of 1200 words

Intriguing Problem: why do these ancient stories have such contemporary and personal resonance?

d) *Transcript of a Presentation by Witherington & Borg*

Purpose: imagine that you are the convener and moderator of a presentation to our seminar by Borg and Witherington, on an important biblical topic of your choosing.

Audience & Format: write to your classmates, and structure this like a play. Be sure to include an opening statement by you, establishing the topic and its importance, and then explaining how the presentation will be organized (e.g., opening statements from each author, followed by responses from each author, followed by Q&A). Max: 2400 words

Intriguing Problem: how to use the opportunity of a 60 minute visit by Borg & Witherington to our seminar to: 1) engagingly convey information about a biblical topic and its importance and 2) demonstrate how these two scholars give an explanation of their views on this topic and argue for the correctness of their view.

- **Writing Quality:** Sadly, many teachers and professors reward students for longer papers rather than better papers, and thus students become quite adept at BS-ing for whatever page length necessary. I despise incoherence, wordiness, and passive constructions in writing, and I will not accept it in student papers. *Ninety percent of student papers I receive could be cut by 50% without losing an ounce of meaning.* Don't write your paper the night before – write it 3 days beforehand, then edit it ruthlessly and upload a clear, coherent, and compellingly written paper. See the excerpts from William Zinser's brilliant classic *On Writing Well* for further guidance.
 - **Support and Submission:** I encourage students to use my office hours as they develop their papers and class presentations; I am happy to provide a “free pre-review” of paper excerpts during my office hours.
Play close attention to the deadline for your written projects. They are also due 5 minutes before the start of class on the date indicated; *do not submit a hard copy and do not e-mail your paper or attach it to a Canvas message.*
 - **Class Presentation:** The best presentations involve much preparation but are not read or memorized; rather, they are delivered in a conversational style to the audience. You may use one sheet of notes to assist you in this presentation. I recommend that you use a large font with key words and possibly any verbatim quotes. The main point here is to know your material well enough to speak about it fluently. Presentations will be limited to 5 minutes, and we will use a timer.
4. *Caveat:* I shall endeavor to follow this syllabus as closely as I can. However, since none of us can foretell the future, I reserve the right to make adjustments as necessary during the course. These adjustments will be announced in advance during class; you are responsible for knowing about these adjustments whether in class or not (just like you are responsible for all class materials whether present or not).

Mandatory College-wide Policies and Statements:

This course conforms to all campus-wide course and academic policies. You may view these policies using these links:

- Final Exam-Evaluation-Reading Days Policy:
<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9136>
- Absence and Attendance Policy:
<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9134>
- Academic Integrity Policy:
<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=7642>
- Disability Support Services:
<http://differingabilities.pages.tcnj.edu>

- Americans with Disability Act Policy:
<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=8082>

E-mail and voice-mail: I check e-mail each weekday morning, and voice mail on days we have class only. Please don't expect me to check my e-mail over the weekends, at night, or during breaks. I never check voice-mail from home. I usually reply within 2 business days to all e-mail messages.

Fourth hour equivalency statement: Although this class meets for three hours each week, it is a 4-credit (1 unit) course that offers a depth of learning with additional learning tasks unfolding in the equivalent of a fourth hour. Students will engage in group or individual learning projects outside of class and/or additional learning experiences occurring multiple times during the semester on or off-campus, including community-engaged learning activities and/or campus-wide events.

Course Schedule: (tentative; professor reserves the right to adjust as desired)

Date(s):	What's Happening	What's Due
Aug 29	Introductions & Course Overview	
Sep 1	The Bible's Continuing Role in America	BiAL Ch 17 pdf (Smidt) Hatch & Noll, "Introduction" pdf
Sep 5	<i>FOLLOW MONDAY SCHEDULE</i>	
Sep 8	Jewish, Muslim, & Secular Humanist Views of the Bible	Kandil pdf; MDI pdf; <i>Some Reasons</i> pdf BWIII "Invitation"
Sep 12	Traditionalist & Modernist Views of the Bible	BWIII Ch 1-2 MJB "Preface," Ch 1 HB Revelation 21-22
Sep 15	<i>No Class Meeting</i>	MJB Ch 2 Due: online quiz
Sep 19 & 22	US as Biblical Nation *HCBms Episode 1: In the Beginning *HCBms Episode 2: Exodus	Noll, "Image of US ..." pdf HB Genesis (chapters) 1-3, 6-9, 12-15, 17-22; Exodus 1-7, 10-14, 19-20
Sep 26 & 29	Bible as Bestseller *HCBms Episode 4: Kingdom	Fey, "Good News" pdf BiAL Ch 18 pdf (Dalton) HB I Samuel 8-13, 16-19, 24, 31; II Samuel 5-7, 11-12; I Kings 6-9
<i>Oct 1</i>	<i>Field trip to Shiloh Baptist Church 10:30am to 2(ish)pm</i>	<i>Mandatory attendance, details to follow Business attire advised</i>
Oct 3 & 6	Bible & Culture Post-FT Discussion *HCBms Episode 6: Revolution	BiAL Ch 11 (Harvey) BWIII Ch 3 HB Matthew 1-4, Luke 1-5 DUE 10/6: Report – Why Shiloh?
Oct 10	<i>Fall Break; no class meeting</i>	
Oct 13	<i>No Class Meeting</i>	Fogarty, "Quest..." pdf DUE 10/13: online quiz
Oct 17 & 20	Bible Readers *HCBms Episode 7: Mission	BiAL Ch 9 pdf (Sutton) & Ch 10 pdf (Pietsch) HB Matthew 6-9, 13-14, John 11 DUE 10/20: Profile of a Bible Reader

Course Schedule, cont'd: (tentative; professor reserves the right to adjust as desired)

Date(s):	What's Happening	What's Due
Oct 24 & 27	Class Presentations Reading Biblical Genres *HCBms Episode 10: Courage	DUE 10/24: 5 min extemporaneous presentations by half of the class BWIII 4-5 HB Proverbs 3, Jonah 1-4, John 20-1, Acts 2-3, 6-10, 16-19, Revelation 1
Oct 31 & Nov 3	Reading Biblical Genres, con't. *AR Episode 1: Birth of a Faith	BWIII 6-8 HB Mark 1-9; John 1-4; Galatians 1-6 DUE 11/3: Resonance Essay
Nov 7	Class Presentations History & Metaphor	DUE 11/7: 5 min extemporaneous presentations by other half of the class MJB Ch 3 HB Isaiah 60, Mark 8-10, Luke 10
Nov 10	Historical Narratives & Pentateuch	BWIII 10 MJB 5 HB Exodus 15, Genesis 37, 39, 41, 50
Nov 14	Psalms & Wisdom Literature	BWIII 11 MJB 7 HB Psalm 1, 8, 22, 23, 139; Ecclesiastes 1-12
Nov 17	Prophets & Prophecy	BWIII 12 MJB 6 HB Isaiah 6,7,40,52,53; Amos 1-9
Nov 21	Gospels	BWIII 13 MJB Ch 8 HB Mark 10-16, John 6, 8, 10-11, 14-15
Nov 24	<i>**Thanksgiving Break Nov 24**</i>	
Nov 27 & Dec 1	Pauline Epistles *AR Episode 2: The Great Missionary	BWIII 14 MJB Ch 9 HB Acts 13-15; Philippians 1-4; review Acts 6-10 & Galatians
Dec 5 & 8	General Epistles The Bible in America *AR Episode 3: Age of the Apostles	BiAL 28 (Noll) HB I Peter 1-5
Final Exam Period	Schedule to be posted by Registrar	DUE to Canvas at start of Final Exam time: Transcript of a Presentation by Borg and Witherington

*HCBms = History Channel "The Bible" mini-series

*AR = "Ancient Roads from Christ to Constantine" (PBS)