

Tim Clydesdale, Ph.D.
Social Science Bldg 312, x3153
E-mail: clydesda@tcnj.edu
Office Hours: Tu 3:30-5:20p; Fr 12:30-1:50p
& Weds by appointment only

FSP161 (SECT 41, 42): AMERICA'S BESTSELLING BOOK – THE BIBLE

Fall 2016

Section 41 (TuFr 2-3:20pm): SSB324

Section 42 (Tu 5:30-8:20pm): SSB323

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: New Revised Standard Version. New York: American Bible Society, 1997. (This will be the official translation used in this seminar.)

Additional readings posted as pdfs on Canvas.

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 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.) computers used for class purposes only, c.) body needs managed to avoid mid-class disruptions, d.) no side conversations or other disruptive behavior, and e.) relevant textbooks brought to class, 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	20%
Biblical Analysis Project	40%
Bible & American Culture Essay	20%
Prepared Participation	<u>20%</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 will focus on the assigned reading for that week (but may include items on previous reading material). The quizzes will include true/false, fill-in the blank, matching, and multiple choice 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. *Biblical Analysis Project:* This is a core assessment of student learning in this seminar. It involves both a written and oral element. The written project, to be submitted in two stages, involves selection of a biblical passage (minimum: approx. 5 verses; maximum: approx. 1 whole chapter), a thorough description of the passage's context (drawn from scholarly resources, addressing authorship & book title, date & place of writing, book theme, book purpose/occasion/background, key passage claim, and literary features), a detailed presentation of a traditional interpretation of the passage, an equally detailed presentation of a modern interpretation of the text, and a personal statement explaining why the student selected this passage, analyzing the traditional and modern interpretations, and presenting one's own, well-supported interpretation of the passage. The oral presentation will take the form of a poster "fair" during the final examination period, in which each student will give to multiple audiences of 2-3 students a 3-4 minute summary of their passage, context, traditional and modern interpretations, and personal analysis, using images and large font text on a poster to illustrate their points.

- Length and Quality: Sadly, most 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.

- **Submission:** Will occur in two stages and two modes – see schedule below. I encourage students to use my office hours as they develop their papers and poster presentations. Upload your written project to Canvas before the start of class on the date indicated below; *do not submit a hard copy and do not e-mail it or send it as an attachment to a Canvas message.* Leave your posters with me after our poster presentation “fair” during the final exam period.

4. *Bible in American Culture Essay:* This is an important assessment of student learning in this seminar. It involves two elements: 1) developing a specific thesis about the Bible in American Culture, which is engagingly introduced then supported with 3-5 evidentiary paragraphs, and 2) applying that thesis to a current or historical use of the Bible in a political, literary, or popular American setting. Students are free to use assigned texts to accomplish #1 (augmenting with additional materials as they see fit), and may choose 1-2 examples freely from politics, literature, film, music, etc. to accomplish #2 (avoid explicitly worship or religious use; for example, religious rock music created for religious audiences would not be suitable, while rock music that engages biblical texts by mainstream groups would be fine).

This assignment will be submitted in two stages. First, you will submit 2 page “essay overview.” This overview will specify your thesis, include 3-5 thesis-supporting, evidentiary sentences, and describe 1-2 examples of non-worship use of biblical texts (assume your professor has no knowledge of American popular culture). Second, based on feedback from me about your overview, you will write this essay – being sure to draw in the reader in an engaging way, present your thesis, prove your thesis with 3-5 supports, and illustrate your thesis with 1-2 examples drawn from non-worship, American cultural uses of biblical texts.

Points made above (#3) about length & quality, and submission via Canvas, apply here as well.

5. *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).

Course Schedule:

Date:	What's Happening	What's Due
Aug 30 (& Sep 2)	Introductions & Course Overview “The Greatest Story Ever Told?”	Genesis, chapters 1-11
Sep 6 (& 9)	Tue – *FOLLOW MONDAY SCHEDULE*	Hatch & Noll pdf, “Intro.” Genesis 12-15, 17-19
Sep 13 (& 16)	The Bible in America Jewish, Muslim, & Secular Humanist views of the Bible	Kandil pdf; MDI pdf; <i>Some Reasons</i> pdf Genesis 21-22,24,27,28-30
Sep 20 (& 23)	US as Biblical Nation Traditionalist & Modernist views of the Bible	Noll, “Image of US ...” pdf BWIII “Invitation,” Ch 1-2 MJB “Preface,” Ch 1 Genesis 37-45; Exodus 4; Revelation 21-22

Sep 27 (& 30)	Catholics & the Bible Biblical Genres	Fogarty, "Quest..." pdf BWIII Ch 3-5 MJB Ch 2 Exodus 1-3, 20; Jonah 1-4; Mark 8,10; Proverbs 3; Luke 10
Oct 4 (& 7)	Modern Bestseller Biblical Genres continued	Fey, "Good News" pdf BWIII Ch 6-8 MJB Ch 3 Exodus 10-14; Mark 1-7,9; John 1-4; Galatians 1-6
Oct 11 (& 14)	Tues: <i>Fall Break; no class meeting</i> Fri: Review & Catch up	Review
Oct 18 (& 21)	<i>Possible field trip to PTS Library; details to follow</i>	Bible in American Culture Essay Overview Due
Oct 25 (& 28)	Ancient Historical & Biographical Narratives <i>**No class meeting on Fri 28th**</i>	BWIII Ch 10 MJB Ch 4-5 Acts 10, Amos 1-9
Nov 1 (& 4)	Prophets & Prophecy	BWIII Ch 12 MJB Ch 6 Isaiah 6,7,40,52,53 Biblical Analysis: Text Selection, Context Description, & T/M interpretive theses due
Nov 8 (& 11)	Songs & Psalms	BWIII Ch 11 Psalm 1, 8, 22, 23, 139 Bible in American Culture Essay Due
Nov 15 (& 18)	Ancient Wisdom Literature, Gospels	BWIII Ch 13 MJB Ch 7 Ecclesiastes 1-11, Mark 11-16
Nov 22 (& 25)	Gospels, part ii <i>**Thanksgiving Break Nov 25**</i>	MJB Ch 8 Matthew 5-7, John 6, 8, 10-11, 14-15; review Mark
Nov 28 (& Dec 2)	Paul/Epistles	BWIII ch 14 MJB ch 9 Acts 6-7,9,13-15; Philippians 1-4; review Galatians
Dec 6 (& 9)	The Canon Review & Final Discussion	BWIII Ch 16 Biblical Analysis Paper Due
Final Exam Period	See schedule posted on PAWS	Biblical Analysis Poster Presentations