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FSP 161-24: AMERICA'S BESTSELLING BOOK – THE BIBLE

Fall 2019: Wednesdays 5:30-8:20pm Kendall 136

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 will help improve your ability to read, write, and speak analytically, to discuss religious issues civilly, and to understand the worlds and lives of others. That means this course is **an exploration of biblical texts, genres, and interpretive paradigms, and of the Bible's influence on American culture**. That also means this course is **not** a “Sunday School” class, “CCD,” or “Bible study.” It is also different from an “Introduction to the Bible” class, which is a standard college course, but which would require a professor with graduate training in biblical studies and different textbooks.

To be successful in this class, then, you need 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
- recognize some of the ways larger historical forces and your own life experiences have influenced your perspective on the Bible and American culture.

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 is the official translation used in this seminar, and it should be used for all class discussions and all writing assignments.)

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 other select readings, all 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 regularly 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: attendance, even if perfect, without regular and on-going participation, will get you a participation grade of D.**

Students will be treated as adults and expected to behave as such in class. This includes:

- a) technology use restricted to class purposes only (no texting or social media use),
- b) body needs managed to avoid mid-class disruptions,
- c) no side conversations or other disruptive behavior,
- d) relevant textbooks brought to class, and
- e) 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. *Course Assignments & Assessments*: Students demonstrate their academic seriousness by turning in all 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 can find help in doing these things with the college's writing tutors.

a. *All assignments should be turned in on time.* Late assignments are penalized as follows:

- 5% deduction for assignments submitted 3 minutes to 11 hours and 59 minutes late,
- 10% deduction for 12h:00m-23h:59m late,
- 20% deduction for 24h:00m-47h:59m late,
- 30% deduction for 48h:00m-71h:59m late,
- 40% deduction for 72h:00m-95h:59m late,
- 50% deduction for 96h:00m (4 days) or more late.

I grant penalty waivers or reduce late penalties when justified by extenuating circumstances – for example, illness, injury, or family emergency. Best odds of receiving a waiver or penalty reduction go to those who notify me *in advance* (email or office hour visit are best), explain their situation, and request a specific number of additional hours needed.

b. *Quizzes should be taken during class time.* Only those with official TCNJ activities (e.g., field trips), or extenuating circumstances as 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 (likely a 10 minute oral quiz).

c. *Plagiarism/Cheating* will not be tolerated, and I will advocate for the fullest penalties possible with the academic integrity officer and/or committee. 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:

Weekly Quizzes/In-Class Essays, and Acad. Integrity Modules	15%
Powerful Narrative Letter	10%

Shiloh Report	10%
Bible Reader Profile	10%
Borg & Witherington Topic, Thesis, Bullet Pts	10%
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. And yes, I do round up (e.g., 89.5 is an A-).

Student Requirements:

1. *Quizzes*: Will occur weekly and focus on the assigned reading for that. The quizzes will be comprised of true/false items or in-class 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) *Powerful Narrative Letter*

Purpose: choose a Bible *story* (i.e., a passage that has a character and a story line), think about why the selected story gets an emotive response from you (e.g., engages or enrages you), and reflect on why stories have such a powerful impact on people

Audience & Format: write this as a letter to a favorite K-12 teacher. Start by explaining your enrollment in this course, and relay a couple interesting things you learned so far about the Bible in America. Then, tell your teacher about the powerful narrative you selected, about why the story gets an emotive response from you, and about why you think stories like this have such a powerful impact on people. End by explaining why you thought this teacher would be interested in this topic.

Maximum of 1500 words.

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

b) *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 for public college students, in the form of a newspaper article. Summarize your observations, conversations, and reflections on what this experience seems to mean to members of the church (i.e., who, what, where, when, how, why). Maximum of 1500 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?

c) *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), find out what Bible stories or texts they like the most & why, how often they read the Bible, what reading the Bible does for them, and what the Bible means to them.

Audience & Format: write as a follow-up letter to the teacher you selected for the powerful narrative letter; maximum of 1500 words

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

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

(Due in two stages, with Topic, Thesis, and Bullet Pts due first, followed by full transcript due during final exam week)

Purpose: imagine that you have been selected to convene and moderate (i.e., organize and host) a presentation to our seminar by Borg and Witherington, where they will give presentations and discuss with each other and students 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, Q&A, and your closing statement indicating where you stand on the issue). Max: 2500 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, 2) demonstrate how these two scholars give an explanation of their views on this topic and argue for the correctness of their view, and 3) indicate where you stand with respect to this topic and why.

- **Writing Quality:** Sadly, many teachers and professors reward students for longer papers rather than better papers, and thus students learn to BS for whatever page length necessary. That is not acceptable in this class. Students will need to generate clear, coherent, and compellingly written papers. See the excerpts from William Zinsser'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 uploading your written projects to Canvas. 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.***
4. **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.
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).

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 & voice mail each weekday morning, and occasionally check my e-mail over the weekends or during breaks. I never check voice-mail from home. I usually reply within 1 business day 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 28	Introductions & Course Overview <i>*HCBms Episode 1: In the Beginning</i>	
Sep 4	**One hour abbreviated class meeting** Bible beliefs & practices in the USA & Canada	BiAL Ch 17 pdf (Smidt) HB Genesis (chapters) 1-3, 6-9, 12-15, 17-22 DUE: Complete all 4 Academic Integrity Online Modules
Sep 11	Traditionalist & Modernist Views of the Bible <i>*HCBms Episode 2: Exodus</i>	BWIII "Invitation," Ch 1-2 MJB "Preface," Ch 1-2 HB Exodus 1-7, 10-14, 19-20; Revelation 21-22
Sep 18	Jewish, Muslim, Secular Humanist Views of the Bible The Bible in American History <i>*HCBms Episode 4: Kingdom</i>	Kandil pdf; MDI pdf; <i>Some Reasons</i> pdf Hatch & Noll, "Introduction" pdf HB I Samuel 8-13, 16-19, 24, 31; II Samuel 5-7, 11-12; I Kings 6-9
Sep 25	<i>Student Presentations</i> US as Biblical Nation The Bible in Ancient & Interpretative Context <i>*HCBms Episode 6: Revolution</i>	Noll, "Image of US ..." pdf BWIII Ch 7-8 HB Matthew 1-4, Mark 1-9, Luke 1-5 DUE: Powerful Narrative Letter, and a third of students will give their class presentation at the start of our class period

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

Date(s):	What's Happening	What's Due
<i>Sunday Sep 29</i>	<i>Possible field trip to Shiloh Baptist Church 10:30am to 2(ish)pm</i>	<i>Mandatory attendance, details to follow Business attire advised</i>
Oct 2	Bible as Bestseller; Children's Bibles *HCBms Episode 7: Mission	Fey, "Good News" pdf BiAL Ch 18 pdf (Dalton) HB Matthew 6-9, 13-14, John 11
Oct 9	<i>Student Presentations</i> Bible & American Music Protestants, Catholics, & the Bible *HCBms Episode 10: Courage	BiAL Ch 11 (Harvey) Fogarty, "Quest..." pdf HB John 20-1, Acts 2-3, 6-10, 16-19, Revelation 1 DUE: "Why Shiloh?" Report, with another third of students giving their report at the start of the class period
<i>Sunday Oct 13</i>	<i>Possible field trip to Shiloh Baptist Church 10:30am to 2(ish)pm</i>	<i>Mandatory attendance, details to follow Business attire advised</i>
Oct 16	Student Bible Reader Panel Reading Biblical Genres	BWIII Ch 3-6 HB Proverbs 3, Jonah 1-4, John 1-4 Galatians 1-6
Oct 23	Historical Narratives & Pentateuch	MJB Ch 3,5 BWIII Ch 10 HB Genesis 37, 39, 41, 50, Exodus 15, Isaiah 60, Mark 8-10, Luke 10 DUE: "Why Shiloh?" Report, with another third of students giving their report at the start of the class period
Oct 30	Psalms & Wisdom Literature	BWIII Ch 11 MJB Ch 7 HB Psalm 1, 8, 22, 23, 139; Ecclesiastes 1-12
Nov 6	<i>Student Presentations</i> Prophets & Prophecy	BWIII Ch 12 MJB Ch 6 HB Isaiah 6,7,40,52,53; Amos 1-9 DUE: Bible Reader Profile, with final third of students giving their report at the start of the class period
Nov 13	Gospels	BWIII Ch 13 MJB Ch 8 HB Mark 10-16, John 6, 8, 10-11, 14-15
Nov 20	Pauline Epistles	BWIII Ch 14 MJB Ch 9 HB Acts 13-15; Philippians 1-4; review Acts 6-10 & Galatians DUE: Final paper topic and thesis, with 4 bullet points each for Borg and Witherington's prepared remarks.
Nov 27	**Thanksgiving Break**	
Dec 4	Wrapping Up: The Bible in America	BiAL Ch 28 (Noll)
Dec 13 @ noon	DUE: Transcript of a Presentation by Borg and Witherington	

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