Theological Hermeneutics

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Course description
‘Theological Hermeneutics’ introduces the student to the fundamental categories of the theory of interpretation. In keeping with the historical trajectory of hermeneutics, its scope expands beyond questions about the rules for textual/biblical interpretation, towards the question of the nature of meaning and understanding as such. I will give a description and an explanation of various hermeneutical emphases: on the world behind the text (history, authorial intention, allegory), the world in the text (structuralism, narrative theory, poetics), and the world in front of the text (reader-response, community-response, deconstruction, liberationist, feminist, queer, postcolonial).

The student will have to do a substantial amount of rather difficult reading in preparation for each class. Class time will be taken up with explaining difficult concepts and answering questions that arise from the reading. Diligence at reading, attention in class, and willingness to ask the right questions are the conditions for obtaining a good grade.

Objectives and rationale
The class will focus on close readings of the assigned texts. Its purpose is twofold:
1) to give an introduction to the various options in philosophical hermeneutics and the theory of interpretation; and
2) to spell out their implications for the theological interpretation of Scripture, with a particular interest in
(a) current hermeneutical options in biblical studies
(b) the relationship between exegesis and theology,
(c) the pastoral and homiletical uses of Scripture, and finally,
(d) missiological, contextual and translational practice. These two components will be structurally embedded in individual lectures.

Learning outcomes
(1) Students will understand the ‘mechanics’ of interpretation from a philosophical as well as a theological standpoint.

1 The present version is still provisional; the definitive version of the syllabus will be available on the first day of class. No changes will be made to the required reading, or the evaluation.
(2) Students will acquire a sense of the importance of non-Scriptural concepts and information (philosophical concepts, scientific theories, historical information) in understanding the very meaning of Scripture. In particular, the unfortunate dichotomy between exegetical studies and systematic theology will be critiqued from the perspective of the dynamics of interpretation.

(3) By reflecting on ‘the meaning of meaning’, the student will be in a better position to distinguish between and evaluate competing theories of interpretation. 

(4) She will also be in a better position to understand what is at stake in debates about the relativity and conflict of interpretations. To this extent, the student will be encouraged to develop mature responses to contemporary issues such as cultural relativism, pluralism, deconstruction, feminist, queer, and postcolonial theory etc.

(5) By explaining the process of meaning formation and communication, the student will be better prepared to communicate the Gospel today. He or she will also have a solid grasp of the issues involved in missional contextualization.

(6) The student will learn to integrate exegetical, systematic, and practical theology. 

(7) Finally, she will have a robust appreciation and understanding of authorial sense hermeneutics, together with the place and importance of historical-grammatical methods.

**Required Books**

* Augustine, *Against the Academicians & The Teacher* (Hackett Classics, 1995), (0872202127)

**Required articles**

* Stout, Jeffrey, ‘What is Meaning’, in *New Literary History* (to be supplied through CAMS)
* Fish, Stanley, ‘Working on the Chain Gang: Interpretation in Law and Literature’
* Frei, Hans, ‘The “Literal Reading” of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?’, in Frei, *Theology and Narrative* (CAMS)
* Ricoeur, Paul, ‘Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics’, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (CAMS)
* Vanhoozer, Kevin, ‘God’s Mighty Speech-Acts’ in *First Theology* (CAMS)
* Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, selected articles (CAMS)
* Kwok-Pui Lan, selected articles (CAMS)
* Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, selected articles (CAMS)
* Ludwig Wittgenstein, selected texts (CAMS)
* Vidu, ‘Frei and Auerbach on the Meaning of the Gospel Narratives’

**Evaluation**

- **Reflection papers (40%)**
  - You will have to write several 1-page (single-spaced) critical reflection paper on selected readings for each class. Look for the (RP) mark next to the relevant readings in the course outline below.
  - Each student will write a 1 page (single spaced) reflection paper prior to each Thursday class. These papers should reflect on the selected reading and include two discussion questions to be taken up in class. Of the twelve class sessions, a maximum number of two such reflection papers may be missed. Any additional missed reflection paper that was not excused by the instructor will incur a 20% assignment grade penalty. The papers will need to be uploaded to Sakai prior to each class. No exceptions will be allowed.

- **Final research paper. Weighed at 60%.** Length: 5,000 words. Due: last day of written work. The topic needs to be approved by the instructor.

**Outline**

   Augustine, *The Teacher* (RP)

2. *Schleiermacher.*
   Zimmermann, 1-160
   Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book 1
   http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/doctrine.i.html (RP)

3. *Bultmann.*
   Thiselton, 143-205
   Bultmann, ‘Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?’ (RP)
   Bultmann, ‘The Problem of Demythologizing’ (RP)

4. *Structuralism, formalism, new criticism*
   Thiselton: 205-293

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2 Each component of the evaluation must be completed in order to receive a passing grade.
Frei, ‘The “Literal Reading”...’ (CAMS) (RP)

5. The Hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer
Thiselton, 293-357
Zimmermann, 160-187
Gadamer, Truth and Method, selections (RP)

6. Paul Ricoeur on the nature of metaphor
Ricoeur, ‘What is a Text?’ (CAMS)
Ricoeur, ‘Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics’ (CAMS) (RP)
Thiselton: 257-464

7. Reader-response, speech-act theory.
Vanhooker, ‘God’s Mighty Speech-Acts’ (CAMS)
Wittgenstein: 1-88 (RP)

8. Wittgenstein and the interpretive community.
Fish, ‘Working on the Chain-Gang’ (RP)
Wittgenstein 89-186 (RP)

Moore – excerpt
Zimmermann, 187-274
Wittgenstein, 187-315 (RP)

10. Feminism and postcolonialism
Sugirtharajah
Kwok-Pui Lan
Fiorenza
Wittgenstein: 316-465 (RP)

11. Narrative Theology
Frei, ‘The Literal Reading’
Vidu, ‘Frei and Auerbach on the Meaning of the Gospel Narratives’
Wittgenstein: 466-695 (RP)

12. Theology and Hermeneutics: Towards Integration
Zimmermann, 274-317 (RP)
Jeffrey Stout, ‘What is Meaning?’
Kevin Hector, Theology After Metaphysics, selection on CAMS (RP)

Suggested further reading

* Cosgrove, Charles, Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules
* Braaten, Carl, History and Hermeneutics, Westminster Press, 1966
* Kelsey, David, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*
* Zimmermann, Jens, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*
* Sanneh, Lamin, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*
* Torrance, T. F., *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics*
* Simonetti, Manlio, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*
* Froehlich, Karlfried, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*
* Barr, James, *Semantics of Biblical Language*
* ____, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism*
* Dawson, John David, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity*
* Ong, Walter J., *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*
* ____, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word.*
* Dworkin, Ronald, *Law’s Empire*
* Watson, Francis, *Text and Truth*
* ____, *Text, Church, and World*
* Kermode, Frank, *The Genesis of Secrecy*
* Kort, Wesley A., *Story, Text, and Scripture: Literary Interests in Biblical Narrative*

**Plagiarism**
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary considers plagiarism to be a grave academic offense. All instances of plagiarism will automatically result in a failing grade. The student is assumed to have read and understood the seminary’s plagiarism policy. If unsure about particular cases (paraphrases etc.), contact the instructor prior to submitting the paper.

**Note on attendance**
Attendance will be recorded each class. Acceptable non-attendance is limited to one week (two class meetings). Any non-attendance beyond this limit will incur grade penalties between one letter grade and a failing grade.