

NT 4313
Interpreting the Bible
Spring 2008

Instructor: Allan J. McNicol
Office: 7640 Guadalupe Street
Conference: By Appointment
Classroom: 7640 Guadalupe Street
Contact Info: 476-2772 (office), 331-6880 (home), mcnicol@austingrad.edu

I. Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students both to the separate and interrelated disciplines of exegesis and hermeneutics. A brief definition of the two may be handy. *Exegesis* may be construed as the procedure for establishing the original meaning of a literary text by the use of philological and historical tools. Basically it involves reading with discipline a text and explaining in an organized way what one has discovered. Hermeneutics in its most simplistic sense refers to the science and art of interpreting texts. More precisely, it involves working out what are the precise conditions for an accurate understanding of a text and explaining why and how pursuing such an exercise constitutes “knowing” or “understanding.”

Primarily, we will attempt to be doing three things for the course: (1) In the first couple of weeks we will give an overview of the basic highpoints in the history of the interpretation of the Bible; (2) Then we will turn to the process of doing exegesis. Primarily working with **Gorman** (our textbook) we will work through the various steps of an exegesis. Students will have weekly class exercises to complete. This will be a very hands-on workshop operation. Our goal will be to equip ourselves with the basic methodology of determining what the text is saying. This exercise will conclude with the student doing an initial exegesis. (3) Finally, we will move to questions of hermeneutics and authority. Here our goal is find a model of interpretation that is defensible for people who consider the Bible to be the norm or standard for Christian believers as they live out their Christian lives in the church. We will finish with a final exegetical paper emphasizing hermeneutics.

Here, at the outset, we need to understand a fundamental point. There are some people who believe that the Bible has about it a quality of being clearly transparent (perspicacious) so that all seekers after the truth will see its message alike. It is argued that the fact that not all people do see its message alike is a result of their bringing certain presuppositions and perspectives (perspectivalism) to the text that lead them astray. This hermeneutical debate between those who hold either the view of perspectivalism or perspicuity is long-standing. We will have cause to visit it several times in this course.

The model of interpretation which we embrace must in some way find a working resolution to this problem.

II. Goals

1. To develop an appreciation by students for the volume and quality of labor set forth in the interpretation of the biblical text in the past several millennia.
2. To acquaint students with the basic tools and resources for doing exegesis and hermeneutical reflection on the Bible.
3. To assist the student in developing critical skills in evaluating what is acceptable and what is not acceptable with respect to biblical exegesis.

III. Objectives

1. To acquaint the student with the major figures and technical terms with respect to biblical exegesis and interpretation.
2. To learn how to do an exegesis. Procedurally, this will be done by working through in workshop fashion the steps of doing an exegesis and (under instructor supervision) producing a final product.
3. To survey the major hermeneutical options of the post-modern era and to develop a defensible theological framework for a contemporary biblical hermeneutical procedure.

IV. Text

Michael Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*. Hendrickson, 2001.

V. Required Work and Evaluation

- A. Regular attendance at class sessions.
- B. Mid-term exam – 25%.
- C. Class assignments, including review of a Bible search program – 25%.
- D. First exegetical paper – 25%.
- E. Second exegetical paper – 25%.
- F. No final.

VI. Libraries, Software, Database, and Various Resources on the Internet

Austin Grad Library: 8:30 AM - 10:00 PM, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday
8:30 AM - 4:30 PM, Wednesday, Friday

Other seminary libraries: APTS Stitt
Episcopal/LSS Booher

<http://NTGateway.com>: Professor Mark Goodacre's resource page.

Check the Austin Grad Library page of our website for a list of helpful website links for theology study.

The Instructor will facilitate student orientation to software and electronic data based resources in the AGST library.

VII. Outline

A. Overview of the Field of Biblical Interpretation

January 23: Opening session explaining the course – Interpreting the Bible in the Ancient and Medieval Period

January 30: The Interpretation of the Bible from the Reformation to Post Modernity

Reading: Gorman 7-33

B. Doing the Exegesis

February 6: Translations of the Bible and the Issue of Finding a Defensible Text

Readings: Gorman 35-57
Several handouts on Textual Criticism

February 13: Finding the Appropriate Context in Which Your Text Rests

Reading: Gorman 65-73

February 20: The Genre, Structure, and Movement of Your Text

Reading: Gorman 75-90

February 27: Detailed Analysis of the Text

Reading: Gorman 91-114

March 5: Synthesis and Major Point(s) of the Exegesis; First Exegesis Due

Reading: Gorman 115-123

March 19: Mid-Term Examination

C. Doing Exegesis Theologically

March 26: Introduction to the Hermeneutical Tasks

Readings: Gorman 124-134

Richard Hays, "Salvation by Trust? Reading the Bible Faithfully,"
Christian Century (1997), 218-223

April 2, 9, 16: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Workshop on our Second Papers

D. The Authority of Scripture

April 23: The Authority of Scripture for the Church

Reading: N.T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" (1989) *Vox Evangelica* 21.

April 30: Scripture and Authority for Today

Reading: Richard Bauckham, *Scripture and Authority Today* (1999). Grove Books.