NT/OT 517 Interpreting the Bible
Summer 2014

"Apply yourself wholly to the text; apply the text wholly to yourself."
Johann Albrecht Bengel
18th c German Lutheran pastor and Greek scholar

Instructor and Contact Information:
Dr. Catherine McDowell; cmcdowell@gordonconwell.edu

Office Hours
Office hours will be scheduled individually. Please do not hesitate to email me for an appointment. I am happy to speak with you. We can talk by phone or Skype, and for those students who live in the Charlotte area, we can meet on campus, as well.

Course Description
This course introduces students to current hermeneutical issues as well as basic tools and methods designed to help students interpret the author's intent. Special emphasis is given to "living out the text" (application). It is designed for those who will not be taking Greek and Hebrew or other courses in OT and NT interpretation. Prerequisites: OT 500, NT 501 and IS 502. If you have not passed these courses at GCTS or received an exemption from the registrar's office you cannot take NT/OT 517 for credit.

Relationship to the Mission of Gordon-Conwell
This course, which seeks to maintain academic excellence in the highest tradition of Christian scholarship (GCTS Missions Statement, Article 2), helps students to become knowledgeable of God’s word and competent in its interpretation (GCTS Missions Statement, Article 1). This will contribute to the students’ development of a vision for God’s redemptive work in the world and to formulate strategies that will lead to effective missions, evangelism, and discipleship (GCTS Missions Statement, Article 6). Being rooted in God’s word and knowing how to interpret and apply it is essential to these tasks.

Relation to Curriculum
NT/OT 517 is a required course for students in the MA-Christian Leadership, MA-Christian Counseling, MA-Christian Ministries, and the hybrid MAR degree programs.
Course Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete this course will

1. be able to interpret the English Bible in its historical, literary, and theological contexts by the critical appropriate reference tools, and secondary sources.
2. learn to apply Scripture in a postmodern world.
3. become trained in using quality library resources related to hermeneutics and biblical studies (both hard-copy and electronic).
4. refine his or her skills in graduate level thinking, discussion, research and writing.

These objectives will be measured by the course requirements (assignments, reading, and participation), as listed below.

Course Schedule

UNIT I: INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS

Module 1 (Week 1): Learning to Read Intelligently

Module 2 (Week 2): The Need for Hermeneutics
The Canon and Translations
The Interpreter & the Goal of Interpretation

Module 3 (Week 3) History of Interpretation; Modern Approaches to Interpretation

UNIT II: THE WORLD IN THE TEXT

Module 4 (Week 4): Logical & Grammatical Analysis of the Text

Module 5 (Week 5) Word, Phrase, and Concept Studies

Module 6 (Week 6) Literary Genres of the Bible, Part I (OT Narrative & Law)

Module 7 (Week 7) Literary Genres of the Bible, Part 2 (Prophecy)

Module 8 (Week 8) Literary Genres of the Bible, Part 3 (Wisdom and Poetry)

Module 9 (Week 9) Literary Genres of the Bible, Part 4 (Gospels, Parables & Acts)
Module 10 (Week 10) Literary Genres of the Bible, Part 5 (Epistles, Apocalyptic)

UNIT III: THE WORLD BEHIND AND AROUND THE TEXT

Module 11 (Week 11) Historical, Cultural & Geographical Contexts;  
Authorship, Audience, Setting

Module 12 (Week 12) Literary Context

Module 13 (Week 13) Biblical-Theological Context

UNIT VI: LIVING OUT THE TEXT

Module 14 (Week 14) A Transformed Life as a Living Gospel “Text”

Required Materials*


*PDFs of additional reading assignments are available in Sakai in the “Resources” folder.

Discussion/Interaction

There will be eight discussion forums over the course of fourteen weeks. These discussions are an important part of the course. They provide an opportunity for us to engage in thoughtful discussion on various topics related to interpretation, and for us to
get to know each other a bit better. The deadline for posting your response (in Sakai) to the forum discussion question is Saturday of that week at 10 p.m. You then need to respond to two other student posts for that module. Those responses (to the two other students) are due on Tuesday at 10 p.m. following the Saturday on which you posted your initial response. Note: not every week has a forum discussion.

Written Assignments

Please submit all written assignments on Colossians (Weeks/Modules 4, 5, & 10-14) as a PDF and email them to me at catherinemcdowell_d475@sendtodropbox.com. Information and directions for each written assignment are located in Sakai under “Resources” > “Assignments”.

Due Dates

Whatever time zone you are in, all due dates for this course are according to Eastern Daylight Time (EDT), that is, the date and time for Charlotte, N.C. If you live or will be traveling in a different time zone, please note that you must submit your work according to the EDT time zone. For example, if the due date for an assignment is June 12 at 10 pm and you are in Chicago, you must submit the assignment by June 12 at 9 pm Chicago time, since Chicago is one hour behind Charlotte. For help determining date and time differences, see http://www.timeanddate.com.

Tips for Success

• Compose your Discussion Forum postings in a Word document, then cut and paste into the forum.

• Use the spell check tool for all postings and assignments before submission.

• There are 14 modules in this course, each one lasting one week. Familiarize yourself with all the activities at the beginning of each module and create a study schedule to ensure that you use your time wisely.

• Set aside time for completing the assigned reading and viewing early in each module to allow time to reflect on the content, participate in Forum postings, and to complete written assignments.

Before You Begin Module 1

Before beginning the first module, become familiar with the entire course through the course webpage in Sakai, which will be available at least one week prior to the May 19th
course start date. (The assignments for the Unit I = Weeks 1-3 are listed below if you would like to get started. Note that you cannot post forum responses until the Sakai page is open. However, you can write them in a word doc now for posting later.) Add due dates to your calendar. You might want to print a copy of the Course Schedule to keep near your computer or study space. There is also a calendar on our Sakai webpage with due dates and reminders.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>% of Total Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reading &amp; Viewing/ Listening Log (in Sakai)</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each week submit in the Assignment log, only once, the % of assigned reading &amp; viewing/listening, you have completed. The submission is due each Saturday no later than 12:00 pm (noon).</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Discussion Forums and Responses to two student posts (2.5 points each)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Forum discussion questions are due on Saturday of that week by 10:00 pm. Responses to two other student posts are due the following Tuesday by 10:00 pm.</td>
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<td>7 exegetical assignments based on Colossians 2:8-14 (10 points each)</td>
<td>70</td>
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**Grading Scale**

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Instructor Feedback

Barring an emergency, I will respond to questions or messages within 24-48 hours, excluding Sundays. I will return graded assignments within 7-10 days of submission.

Late Work

_Late work is not accepted_ except in the case of an emergency or extenuating circumstances. Extenuating circumstances will be considered as appropriate. Questions about extensions should be directed to the registrar’s office. If you anticipate a problem, contact me as soon as possible.

Netiquette

Gordon-Conwell does not tolerate disruptive or disrespectful behavior in the online communications in any course. Students should review the netiquette policy in the _Student Handbook_ and this website: _http://www.albion.com/netiquette_.

Additional Seminary Policies

For additional seminary policies that may pertain to this course, please refer to the _Syllabus Addendum_.

UNIT I: INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS

Module 1 (Week 1): Learning to Read Intelligently

_May 19-24_

“Cultural literacy is crucial for those who are not content simply to be carried along by cultural winds and waves (cf. Eph 4:14) but who want critically and constructively to engage culture for the sake of the gospel.”

K. Vanhoozer, _Everyday Theology_, p. 18

“...if we are disposed to go on learning and discovering, we must know how to make books teach us well.”

M. Adler, _How to Read a Book_, p. 15

Module Overview

This module is designed to help students become intelligent readers of both texts and culture.
**Module Objectives**

Upon successful completion of this module, you will

- know how to be a much more active and demanding reader of a text.
- begin to understand what your presuppositions, culture, values, etc. are and how they impact your understanding, interpretation, and application of scripture.
- begin to interpret culture theologically so that you may do a better job of “translating” the message of Scripture and living it out in your contemporary context.

**Read**

Adler and van Doren p. 3-20, 31-136  
Vanhoozer, *Everyday Theology*, p. 7-60 (in Sakai)

**View**

http://apologetics.com/blog/swelbaum/interview-dr-kevin-vanhoozer/

*Note: I don’t fully agree with Vanhoozer’s final comments on method. While I appreciate his comments about reading scripture theologically, and while no method is foolproof, in this course we will learn a method of interpreting Scripture that, I believe, will help us to determine what the original authors intended and how, then, to live out that truth in our own context.*

In this course we will focus less on the traditional approach to application and ask the following questions instead:

1. How do our truth claims relate to the way we live?

2. How do we embody the message of a biblical text?

3. How does a given biblical text, in light of the gospel (from Genesis to Revelation), compel us to live our life (our lives) in our world so that our own story (stories) lines up with the Biblical story?

We will be asking ourselves these questions throughout the course. I encourage you to print them out and keep them near your study space.

**Forum**

1. Introduce yourself to the class. How do you anticipate that this course will serve you
2. In Everyday Theology Vanhoozer states:

“Cultural texts project worlds of meaning that invite us in and encourage us to make our home there. The world of a cultural text - say, for example, the world projected by Friends, Survivor, or Desperate Housewives, unfolds a possible way of living together, a possible way of being human. But we can go further. These culturally created worlds present themselves accompanied by the whisper of their creators: “And behold, it is very good.” There’s the rub. Should we accept the invitation? Should we appropriate the projected cultural world, enter in, and pitch our tent? It is a truism in Christian mission that we must go and address people where they live. Quite so. My point is that ‘they’ (and we) frequently live in cleverly devised mythical worlds created by media and marketing moguls.” (p. 27, my emphasis).

a. Spend about 30 minutes walking around your local mall. What does the mall/these stores want you to believe or do, and into what are they trying to fashion you? What values are promoted, and how are they promoted? According to the mall and its individual stores, what is “the gospel” (the good news) and how does one achieve “the good life”? How does this impact a shoppers’ thinking? (250 words) (If you do not live within a 30 min or so drive of a mall contact me for an alternative assignment).

b. What are the most important cultural values promoted in the country or region (of the world, of the country) where you grew up? What were the most important values promoted by your parents and family? How do these values impact your understanding of and application of Scripture? Further, how might your personality, life experience, and church tradition affect your interpretation of scripture? (250 words)

We all read and interpret scripture through a series of lenses, some of which are helpful, and some of which distort the gospel. Throughout this course, pray and ask God to reveal to you which lenses you need to discard, and which lenses you should keep.

Module 2 (Week 2): May 26 - 31
Need for Hermeneutics

Module Overview

This module is an introduction to biblical interpretation. Pray for God to give you a sense of excitement at learning how to interpret his word, and to open your mind that you may understand the Scripture, the written revelation of God himself. Interpretation is demanding work, but it is well worth the reward of understanding God’s word, knowing Him through it and, as a result, living a transformed life.

Module Objectives:
Upon successful completion of this module, you will:

- understand the need for and the rewards of skilled biblical interpretation, as well as the challenges we face.
- gain an overview of the history of biblical interpretation.
- be introduced to the OT and NT canon and the major English translations.
- understand further how one’s own presuppositions about the nature of Scripture and the task of interpretation shape his or her work.

**Read**

KBH Chpts. 1, 4-6
Schultz p. 7-38

**View/Listen to**

Dr. Robert Stein

[https://www.biblicaltraining.org/introduction/hermeneutics-0](https://www.biblicaltraining.org/introduction/hermeneutics-0)
[https://www.biblicaltraining.org/introduction/hermeneutics-1](https://www.biblicaltraining.org/introduction/hermeneutics-1)

**Forum Discussion**

1. Some of the common Evangelical approaches to scripture unintentionally promote a reader-centered method of interpreting the Bible. List a few examples. How can this distort the meaning of the text? (75-100 words)

2. “How should we evaluate conflicting claims regarding the accuracy of Bruce Wilkinson’s interpretation and application of the prayer of Jabez? What role should the record sales of his book and the positive testimonies of individuals who have prayed this prayer play in such a debate?” (Schultz, p. 23 #1) (150-200 words)

**Module 3 (Week 3):**

June 2 - 7

History of Interpretation; Modern Approaches to Interpretation

**Module Overview**

This module is designed to give students a brief overview of the history of biblical interpretation, including a survey of modern approaches. Special attention will be given to the hermeneutical challenges evangelicals face in a postmodern world.
Module Objectives

Upon successful completion of this module, you will
● gain an appreciation for the lengthy history of biblical interpretation that has preceded us
● be introduced to and learn to evaluate some of the recent literary and social-scientific approaches to biblical interpretation
● consider in what ways postmodernism has had a beneficial impact on hermeneutics
● understand what is at stake if we abandon an author-oriented approach to hermeneutics

Read

KBH Chpts. 2-3

“The SBJT Forum: Evangelical Responses to Postmodernism” (in Sakai as sbjt_2001summer8.pdf)

Stein, “The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics” (in Sakai)

Forum Discussion Questions

1. Stein makes a case for author-centered meaning. Is he convincing? Why or why not? (100 words)
2. What positive things can we learn from postmodernism at it pertains to biblical hermeneutics? (100 words)
3. Respond to Scott Hafemann's claim in the SBJT article that, “All interpretations are not created equal, simply because they are held with equal sincerity and passion.” How (on what basis), then, do we evaluate differing interpretations? (100-150 words)

*for the rest of the course see “Course Schedule” above and the course webpage in Sakai (available on or before May 12).