I. Course Description

Mental health professionals will often encounter clients operating from within a Christian worldview. This course seeks to provide these professionals with a framework for examining how an individual’s interpretations of discrete Scriptures position him or her for greater or diminished mental and relational health. In particular, the course seeks to equip future counselors to help disentangle interpretations of Scripture that perpetuate dysfunction and to help construct interpretations that are both sound and healthful.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

Knowledge Objectives:
8. Access and engage relevant secondary literature.
   9a. Identify and critically reflect upon multiple theologies and hermeneutics of Scripture (such as they might encounter among their client body) and will identify and critically reflect upon their own theology and hermeneutic of Scripture.
   9b. Engage in practices that facilitate sound biblical interpretation and ongoing spiritual formation.
   9c. Identify and disentangle unsound interpretations of Scripture that have facilitated dysfunction and produced mental dis-ease in their clients’ behaviors and relationships.

Professional Skills Objectives
2. Demonstrate healthful interpretations and applications of Scripture related to counseling practice.

III. Course Requirements

A. Textbooks and Other Materials


B. Attendance

According to the Student Handbook, attendance at all class sessions is expected, unless the professor has been notified in advance and has approved the absence. Students should be on time and should stay through the duration of all classes. Any student missing more than six class hours (2 weeks) will be required to do additional work, receive a lower grade, audit or withdraw from the class, or be penalized otherwise at the discretion of the professor.
C. Assignments/Assessment of Student Learning

**Participation.** Attendance at all class sessions is expected, and you should come prepared to contribute to discussions in class. You are expected, therefore, to have read and digested before class the materials assigned for each session. Attendance and consistent contributions in class are expected. *Any unexcused absence will negatively impact the Participation grade.* Showing up to class unprepared to participate will count as an unexcused absence.

**Synoptic Gospels exercise.** 4-6 pages. Due in class Sept 10. See final page of syllabus for details.

**Spectrum List exercise.** 5-7 pages. Due electronically by the end of class time (9:00 p.m.) on October 15. This exercise will allow us to apply insights from our conversations about the Bible so far and to practice on Steps 1 and 2 in *WLB*. For this exercise you will pick one passage from the Gospels or the New Testament epistles that is ‘controversial’ in some way. Then you will undertake the following steps:

1. Summarize the passage and explain why it is controversial. Think about practical, not just theological issues. In other words, is the controversy over a theological idea, or is it related to the practice of Christianity? (For example, a passage about predestination could be mainly theological, while a passage on baptism could relate to actual practices in the church.)
2. Following *WLB* chapter 3, make a list of all the questions you can ask of the text. Remember to take nothing for granted. Try to read the text with fresh eyes. You are not trying to explain anything about the text at this point, just to raise all the questions that could require exploration. [Warning: Once you do this, you’ll never be able to sit passively at a Bible study again, because you’ll want to be active in asking questions. And that’s a GOOD thing! Acts 17:11: “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”]
3. Research and identify three sources—such as journal articles, blogs, commentaries—in which the author takes a clear stance on the interpretation of your passage. Now follow *WLB* chapter 6 and make a list of these, summarizing the main argument(s) of each and placing them on a spectrum. [Note: If you have three sources that all agree, you won’t be able to do this exercise very well, so find some variety.] You will **not yet** be doing any analysis/critique of the positions—that will happen later.
4. Now go back to each source one at a time and try to identify what questions those authors are choosing to address. No author can cover everything, so every author has internally made a list of questions for himself/herself. So what questions are being addressed in each case, and what is being ignored? [Note: You might discover that 3 authors are interpreting the same passage differently because they are asking very different questions.]

The final product does not have to look like a normal paper. Parts of the exercise will involve writing paragraphs of analysis, but other parts will simply be making lists and summarizing arguments. All of this is important for the method in *WLB*.

**Final Paper.** 6-8 pages. Due electronically by the end of class time (9:00 p.m.) on December 10. Working on the same passage as you did for the Spectrum List exercise, you will now go back and complete steps 3-5 in *WLB*. Your paper should demonstrate that you have done the following:
Step 3: Study. Show that you have done your best to think through the issues, then consult with a librarian to find outside resources (focus on commentaries, articles, and books or parts of books) that will allow you to see how others have dealt with this passage. [Note: The sources you used for the earlier assignment could count, but don’t feel bound by just those. You may now realize that one or more of those is of low value.]

Step 4: Filter. Now you must begin to evaluate and/or critique the sources based on their arguments. You can’t talk about everything for all the sources, so focus on perhaps one primary issue/critique/strength of each source. And be aware of why you make certain choices as you filter (see ch. 15-16 in WLB).

Step 5: Choose. State your own conclusion about the meaning of a passage and give the primary arguments in favor of this conclusion.

D. Calculation of Grade and Connection of Learning Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Percent of Final Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>9b, 9c, 2</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospel parallels exercise</td>
<td>9a, 9b</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectrum List exercise</td>
<td>8, 9a, 9b, 9c</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>8, 9a, 9b, 9c, 2</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
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IV. Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/Session #</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
<th>Lecture/Topic</th>
<th>Readings/Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>August 27</td>
<td>Introduction to the course</td>
<td>Bring a Bible to class!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What is the Bible?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do translations matter?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>September 3</td>
<td>How do we interpret the Old Testament?</td>
<td>F&amp;S ch. 1-2, 5, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>September 10</td>
<td>What are the Gospels, and how do they relate to each other?</td>
<td>F&amp;S ch. 6-8 GOSPELS EXERCISE DUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>September 17</td>
<td>How should we approach the New Testament epistles?</td>
<td>F&amp;S ch. 3-4 Galatians, James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>September 24</td>
<td>Who is the audience? Are all things for all people and times?</td>
<td>F&amp;S ch. 11-13 Revelation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>October 1</td>
<td>The exegetical process, Steps 1 and 2</td>
<td>WLB ch. 1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 15</td>
<td></td>
<td>No in-class meeting</td>
<td>SPECTRUM LIST EXERCISE DUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>October 22</td>
<td>The exegetical process, Step 3a</td>
<td>WLB ch. 7-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>October 29</td>
<td>The exegetical process, Step 3b</td>
<td>WLB ch. 11-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>November 12</td>
<td>The exegetical process, Step 4</td>
<td>WLB ch. 14-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>November 19</td>
<td>The exegetical process, Step 5 and review</td>
<td>WLB ch. 17-18, Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 10</td>
<td></td>
<td>No in-class meeting</td>
<td>FINAL PAPER DUE</td>
</tr>
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</table>
V. Recommendations for Lifelong Learning

- Join a professional academic society and attend regional or national meetings to hear papers on the theory and application of the methods of biblical interpretation. Examples would include the Evangelical Theological Society and the Society of Biblical Literature.
- Attend lectures given by scholars at conferences or at seminaries in your area.
- Organize a small group of your classmates who will agree to stay in touch and be resources for each other after you finish the degree. They may be in your area or farther away, for technology makes communication much easier. (I still meet annually with friends from a seminary group, and I finished that degree in 2002.)
- Find excellent biblical teachers and follow their blogs, read their books, and/or listen to their sermons online.
- Read classic Christian works to hear the voices of other interpreters through the centuries. Even form a reading group in your church or area.
- Above all: Don't feel like you need to go it alone! The New Testament teaches that interpretation should happen within a community.

VI. Seminary Guidelines

A. ATS Academic Integrity Policy
Ashland Theological Seminary expects each student to uphold the Seminary’s core value of academic excellence by contributing to an environment that is both challenging and supportive. In such an environment a student will neither seek nor offer improper assistance. All students have an obligation to be forthright in their academic endeavors and to respect ethical standards. The work that one submits for academic evaluation must be one’s own, unless an instructor expressly permits certain types of collaboration. Academic integrity requires that each student will use one’s own capabilities to achieve one’s fullest potential and will neither offer nor accept aid that is not in keeping with regularly accepted standards of academic integrity. Failure to conform to this conduct shall constitute academic dishonesty. The full Academic Integrity Policy statement may be found in the Student Handbook.

B. Academic Support Services
If you need assistance with writing projects for your coursework, contact the ATS Academic Support Center. The center provides free sessions with a peer consultant who can help you with all of your concerns about academic support including writing, critical thinking, documentation, reading skills, study skills, test taking skills, time management. Contact the center if you have a question about how to complete your assignment, if you have documentation questions, or if you would like to have your paper evaluated for areas needing improvement. The ATS Academic Support Center can be reached at 419-289-5162 or by e-mail at atswc@ashland.edu.

C. Students with Disabilities
Ashland University makes every effort to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students who have a specific physical, psychiatric or learning disability and require accommodations are encouraged to inform their instructors of their needs early in the semester so that learning needs can be appropriately met. It is the student’s responsibility to document the disability with Disability Services in The Center for Academic Support on the 7th floor of the Ashland University Library, 419-289-5904.
D. ATS Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>97-100</td>
<td>Superior achievement of course objectives, diligence and originality, high degree of freedom from error, outstanding evidence of ability to utilize course knowledge, initiative expressed in preparing and completing assignments, positive contributions verbalized in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>92-96</td>
<td>Good work submitted, commendable achievement of course objectives, some aspects of the course met with excellence, substantial evidence of ability to utilize course material, positive contributions verbalized in class, consistency and thoroughness of work completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>86-88</td>
<td>Acceptable work completed, satisfactory achievement of course objectives, demonstrating at least some ability to utilize course knowledge, satisfactory class contribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>83-85</td>
<td>Passing but minimal work, marginal achievement of course objectives, poor performance in comprehension of work submitted, inadequate class contributions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>Unacceptable work resulting in failure to receive class credit, inadequacy of work submitted or of performance and attendance in class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VII. Selected Bibliography or References

Synoptic Gospels Exercise
The Cleansing of the Temple
4-6 pages

Matthew 21:12-17
Mark 11:11-19
Luke 19:45-48
John 2:13-22

1. Copy or type the texts side by side in 4 columns (Word or Excel would work). If you’re using Word, use Landscape orientation of the paper to give you more width.

2. Read the 4 versions carefully and compare them with one another. Use a system to highlight:
   a. What elements, details, or quotations (if any) are shared by all 4.
   b. What elements are shared by at least 2 of the accounts?
   c. What elements are unique to individual gospels.

3. You should now have a text in which all the words are highlighted somehow. Some may choose to print out the clean text and mark it up by hand, while others may choose to do all the highlighting in Word and then print it out. Either way is fine.

4. Look at the highlighting of the texts and answer the following questions:
   a. How are the four versions alike, and how do they differ?
   b. Do some versions seem to be related to each other, or do they all seem to be independent of each other?
   c. Focusing on the end of the passages, what outcome(s) result from this event, according to the authors?
   d. Now look at where this story appears in each writer’s account of Jesus’ life. Does this tell you any more about possible connections between the gospels?

5. Give 2 insights from this exercise that you could use in a lesson or sermon, and explain how you would use them.

6. List any questions that this exercise has prompted.

So, you will turn in:

- a marked-up list of parallel texts
- responses to the 4 questions (4.a-d above)
- your 2 insights and how you would use them
- any questions you have.