

Syllabus for The Authority of Scripture
CT 735
Spring 2015
Instructor: Sarah Lancaster

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

For Christians to call the Bible “scripture” is to acknowledge that it is a sacred, authoritative text for the community. But what kind of authority does it have? The course will examine several factors that must be considered in answering this question, such as the concept of authority itself; the Protestant doctrine of scripture as it was formulated after the Reformation; various challenges to the authority of scripture; and various attempts to affirm the authority of scripture in the face of these challenges.

OBJECTIVES:

- 1) To become acquainted with a range of responses to the question about the Bible’s authority.
- 2) To begin to locate one’s own response to the question within the range of options.
- 3) To begin to test how an understanding of the Bible’s authority might affect the way one approaches a particular text or contemporary issue.
- 4) To continue to develop critical thinking skills.
- 5) To continue to develop writing skills.

TEXTS:

Achtemeier, Paul J. *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture*.
Blaisdell, Charles R., ed. *Conservative, Moderate, Liberal: The Biblical Authority Debate*.
Brown, William P., ed. *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*
Dungan, David L., *Constantine’s Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament*
Gaillardetz, Richard R. *By What Authority? A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium, and the Sense of the Faithful*
Science, Evolution, and Creationism National Academy of Sciences
Various essays posted on Sakai

ASSIGNMENTS:

Each student will be required to do the following:

Write one 4-5 page paper that identifies which range of issues (conservative, moderate, liberal) best reflect your own position at this point in time. Due March 19.

Write one 4-5 page paper that analyzes a denominational statement and compares it to your own position at this point in time. Due April 23.

Write one 8-10 page paper that outlines your current understanding of the Bible’s authority in the creation/evolution or homosexuality debate.

Come prepared with topics for class discussion.

Attend class regularly.

GRADING:

First paper: 25%

Second paper: 25%

Third paper: 30%

Class participation: 20%

SCHEDULE:

February 5: Introduction to the course

February 12: The Making of the Canon

Dungan (read the whole book), MacDonald, Charlesworth and Wooden (on Sakai)

February 19: Protestant Orthodox Doctrine of Scripture

Reading: Lancaster, Women and the Authority of Scripture, chapter 2 (on Sakai)

Bultmann, "The Mythological Element in the Message of the New Testament and the Problem of Its Reinterpretation" (on Sakai)

February 26: Contemporary Struggles

Brown, introduction and chapters 2-5, 9-14, 16

Select 4 of these chapters and answer questions 1, 2, and 7 at the end of the introduction for each chapter you have chosen. Post answers on Sakai, then participate in the forum discussion.

Class will not meet on this day. Work will be done online.

March 5: Contemporary Struggles

Brown, chapters 1 (Brettler), 6 (Fretheim), 7 (Jenson), 8 (Johnson), and 15 (Verhey)

March 12: Debated Issues

Reading: Blaisdell, preface and chapters 1-2

March 19: Debated Issues

Reading: Blaisdell, chapters 3-4

First paper due

March 26 and April 2: Spring break and Holy Week

April 9: Constructive Proposal

Achtemeier (read the whole book)

April 16: Constructive Proposal

Gaillardetz (read the whole book)

April 23: Denominational positions

Reading: student research

Second paper due

April 30: Evolution

Reading: *Science, Evolution and Creationism*, student research on denominational positions on this topic

May 7: Homosexuality

Reading: Wright, Johnson, Tushnet, student research on denominational positions on this topic

May 14: Preaching

Reading: Student selection of lectionary passages

Final paper for seniors due.

May 21: Summary Conversation

Final paper due

ADA—MTSO seeks to remove barriers to inclusion in its learning communities. Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs at the beginning of the semester. Please contact the Director of Student Services to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Any accommodation must be agreed upon prior to the due date of the affected course requirement.

Please see Student Handbook for sections providing policy details on the following:

Class attendance—Regular attendance is expected in all classes. During unavoidable absences, students are responsible for missed work. An excessive number of absences may result in grade reduction or course failure, despite successful completion of all assigned work. In most cases, a student will not be allowed credit for a course if he or she is absent for 25% of the class sessions. As it relates to blended courses, students may not be allowed credit if they are absent for 25% of class meetings or if 25% of online course work is not completed. Use of Skype or similar technology is not a substitute for attendance in class.

Electronic Devices—Turn mobile devices off or “vibrate only” during class. Browsing the Internet or engaging in email or social network conversations during class is discouraged. Instructors have the right to impose grading penalties for disruptions due to electronic devices.

Human Subjects Research—Research by MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel that collects non- public information from and/or about living individuals or contemporary organizations/groups for purposes of publication or public presentation (including class assignments) must be approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee. MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel should err on the side of caution and apply for committee approval of any activity that may fit this description.

Inclusive Language—In accordance with MTSO’s policy on inclusive language, all students are expected to use gender inclusive or gender neutral language in their writing and in the classroom discussions when referring to human beings.

Incompletes—To receive a course grade of Incomplete, students must submit the petition form from the Registrar with all signatures to the Dean’s Office before the last day of regularly scheduled classes. See Student Handbook for intensive term deadlines. Any petition submitted without a due date for outstanding work will be denied. If work is not complete by the due date the Registrar will record the grade of F for the course.

Pass/Fail—The decision to exercise this option must be made before the end of the second week of the course by completing the appropriate form available through the Registrar. To receive a grade of “pass” the student must do at least the equivalent of C minus work in the course.

Plagiarism—Plagiarism is a serious matter of academic, professional, and personal integrity. All students at the masters level are expected to understand the requirement to provide attribution when the work of others is used. Students are also expected to be familiar with and understand the school's policy on Academic Misconduct found in the Student Handbook. If students have questions about attribution, citation, and how to avoid plagiarism they should consult the course instructor, the school's writing instructor, or library staff. When in doubt it is better to provide attribution even if one is uncertain about the proper citation form. Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct that results in disciplinary actions per the Student Handbook that may range from failing an assignment or course to expulsion.