CULTURAL HERMENEUTICS – Ideology, Power and Text Interpretation

SYLLABUS

FALL 2009

PROFESSORS:
Brian K. Blount & Mark Lewis Taylor

CLASSES:
Tuesday 2:10 - 4:00 pm
Thursday 2:10 - 4:00 pm

Office Hours: for both Drs. Blount and Taylor, by appointment. (Please contact either one by email.)
COURSE EMPHASIS AND GOALS

This course will emphasize:

- how cultural perspective influences the interpretation of biblical and theological sources.
- that all biblical and theological scholarship is contextually determined, even that which is based on historical critical methods.
- that both biblical and theological interpretation are influenced by contextual variables which determine the investigative conclusions reached. These variables will be carefully examined.
- that what gives the historical critical methods their interpretive power is the ideological presumption that their methods produce a scientifically neutral investigation.

and therefore,

- that other kinds of biblical and theological reflection are marginalized.
- that the political and cultural determinations of context should be celebrated.
- that interpreters can enhance their own findings by considering more appreciatively how the biblical and theological material is understood from other perspectives.

It is the ultimate intention of the course that the class members learn how contextual variables can influence biblical and theological interpretation and how those same variables can help determine what an investigator believes to be the meaning of a text. This contextual approach will help the student recognize that a vast meaning potential resides within each text. Our analyses will demonstrate how researchers from unique backgrounds access different segments of that meaning potential, thereby arriving at unique conclusions regarding text meaning.

The procedure will be to consider the ways in which the legacies of Rudolf Bultmann and Hans-Georg Gadamer, the Negro spirituals, the peasant community at Solentiname, Black preachers, fundamentalist, womanist, Asian and Asian-American, Latino/a, disabled and gay/bi/lesbian communities interpret biblical texts. This work will introduce the principles that will be important in fulfilling the course requirements given below. Our work will (1) demonstrate those contextual factors which are most influential in their interpretive process, and (2) determine how those factors operate.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular attendance at all class lectures.

2. A Midterm Paper due October 27. This first paper, 4-5 pages long, will be a report on your own style/procedure of interpreting texts. Summarize the approach and procedure you follow when interpreting a biblical text for yourself and/or some other person or group (a congregation, a bible-study, for giving a sermon, for critique in a literary group, etc.). Reflect on your context of interpretation in relation to the issues of context raised in this course. [Roughly 40 percent of course grade]

3. A Final Paper due at end of term, as set by your institution. This second paper, 8-10 pages long, invites you to select a historically identifiable community. Then specify what are the key contextual variables which influence the ways in which this community might interpret biblical and theological texts. Delineate as carefully as possible how these variables might affect the kind of meaning that is derived from the text. [Roughly 40 percent of course grade]

The goal of all requirements is to enable students to recognize and analyze how contextual variables influence not only traditional historical-critical and recent political-liberation researchers, but also how they shape and influence variables in students’ own work as well.
AGENDA

UNIT 1 – INTRODUCING “CULTURAL HERMENEUTICS”

Sept 22 (Tu) Space Matters (Introducing the Course)
(lecturer: Dr. Blount)

• Blount, Cultural Interpretation, vii-ix, 1-23.

• Beckford, “Introduction,” Jesus Dub, 1-12.

-Dussel, A Philosophy of Liberation, chapter 1.

Sept 24 (Th) Hermeneutics – What Is It?
(lecturer: Dr. Taylor)

• Taylor, Remembering Esperanza, 46-56.

• Horsley, Jesus and Empire, 1-14

• Beckford, “Theorizing the Politics of Sound,” Jesus Dub, 15-27.

UNIT 2 - HERMENEUTICS OF GADAMER AND BULTMANN

Sept 29 (Tu) Bultmann and Demythologization
(lecturer: Dr. Blount)

• Blount, 27-34.

• Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, 3-15


• Bultmann, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" Existence and Faith, 289-97.

Recommended:
Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, 11-59.
Oct 1 (Th)  Gadamer and the Hermeneutical Circle  
(lecturer: Dr. Taylor)


UNIT 3 - HERMENEUTICS BEYOND BULTMANN AND GADAMER

Oct 6 (Tu)  Beyond Bultmann to Political Theology  
(lecturer: Dr. Blount)

- Blount, 34-9.
- Soelle, 1-9, 41-53, 55-69.
- Rowland and Corner, 69-74.

Recommended:

Oct 8 (Th)  Beyond Gadamer to Political Theology  
(lecturer: Dr. Taylor)


Recommended:
David Tracy, “Interpretation, Conversation, Argument,” in his *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 1-27.
UNIT 4 - AFRICAN-AMERICAN HERMENEUTICS

Oct 13 (Tu) African-American Hermeneutics: Culture, Scripture, Theology
(lecturer: Dr. Blount)


• Blount, 55-86.

Recommended:
- Felder, Stony the Road We Trod, 1-9.

Oct 15 (Th) African-American Hermeneutics: Culture, Scripture, Theology
(lecturer: Prof. Taylor)

• W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of the Sorrow Songs," The Souls of Black Folk, ch. XIV.


Recommended:
UNIT 5 - FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS

Oct 20 (Tu) Cultural and Political Traditions  
(lecturer: Dr. Blount)


Oct 22 (Th) Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics  
(lecturer: Dr. Taylor)


- Blount, 205-11.

[FALL BREAK]

UNIT 6 - WOMANIST HERMENEUTICS

Nov 3 (Tu) Cultural and Political Traditions  
(lecturer: Dr. Blount)


- Grant, Jacquelyn, White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus, Atlanta: Scholars


Recommended:

Nov 5 (Th)  Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics
(lecturer: Dr. Taylor)


- Weems, Renita J., "Reading Her Way through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible," Stony the Road We Trod, 57-77.

UNIT 7 — LATIN AMERICAN & LATINO/A HERMENEUTICS

Nov 10 (Tu)  Cultural and Political Traditions
(lecturer: Dr. Blount)

- Maria Pilar Aquino, “Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology: Toward an Intercultural Theology for the Third Millennium” in Espín and Díaz, 6-41.

Nov. 12 (Th) Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics  
(lecturer: Dr. Taylor)


Recommended:
Elizondo, Virgilio P. "Mestizaje as a Locus of Theological Reflection," in Arturo J. Banuelas, Mestizo Christianity, 5-27.

UNIT 8 — ASIAN & ASIAN-AMERICAN HERMENEUTICS

Nov 17 (Tu) Cultural and Political Traditions  
(lecturer: Dr. Taylor)


- Wonhee Anne Joh, Heart of the Cross, xiii-xxvi, 1-18.

Recommended:

Nov 19 (Th) Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics  
(lecturer: Dr. Taylor, with Dr. Blount in Dialogue)

- Kwok, Introducing Asian Feminist Theology, 38-64.

**Recommended:**
- Eleazar S. Fernandez, “Exodus Toward Egypt: Struggle to Realize the Promised Land In America,” in Fernandez and Segovia, 167-81.

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**UNIT 9 – GAY/BI-/LESBIAN HERMENEUTICS**

**Dec 1 (Tu) Cultural and Political Traditions**
(lecturer: Dr. Blount)


**Dec 3 (Th) Biblical and Theological Traditions**
(lecturer: Dr. Taylor)


UNIT 10– HERMENEUTICS IN DISABLED COMMUNITIES

Dec. 8 (Tu) Cultural and Political Traditions
(lecturer: Dr. Blount)

• Eiesland, “Coming to Terms,” in The Disabled God, 19-29.

• Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Theorizing Disability: Feminist Theory, the Body and the Disabled Figure,” in Thomson, Extraordinary Bodies, 19-30.


Dec 10 (Th) Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics
(lecturer: Dr. Blount, with Dr. Taylor in dialogue)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

All the following texts are on reserve in Luce Library. Texts preceded by an asterisk (*) are also available in the TBA.


*Eiesland, Nancy. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Nashville,


KEY TO ART WORK IN SYLLABUS

Images have been selected to show diversity in imaging Jesus and in organizing a discipleship of solidarity with marginalized and excluded peoples.


3. AU Up With Haitian Peasants! symbol, for the Mouvman Peyizan Papay Education and Development Fund (MPP-EDF), from The Peasant, Winter 1994.


5. “Now,” poster of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), showing members singing freedom songs at a 1962 demonstration in Wash. D.C. SNCC, founded in 1960 by Ella Baker, was instrumental in organizing the march in Selma, Alabama, and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Poster by Danny Lyon/Magnum Photos, photography © 1962, Offset, SNCC, early 1960s, Atlanta, GA. (photocopied from Perpetual Calendar, cited above.)

6. “No Olvidemos! A Julius y Ethel Rosenberg”/“We Won’t Forget Julius and Ethel Rosenberg! Assassinated by the U.S. Government of War of the U.S. Because they Loved and Believed in Peace.” During the McCarthy era, on June 19, 1953, the Rosenberg’s were electrocuted at Sing Sing “for espionage by judgment of a civil court,” orphaning their two sons, 6 and 10 years old. Angel Brach and Celia Caleron, woodcut, 1953. Taller de Gráfica Popular, Mexico City, Mexico. (photocopied from Perpetual Calendar, cited above)

7. The Cameroon artist, Englebert Mweng, created this image Ain the apse of a chapel in Douala, Cameroon. In the original version, three colors were used that have special meaning in West Africa: black stands for suffering, white for the dead, and red for the living. In the semi-circular apse Christ stretches his arms not only upward but also to the fore, so that he encompasses the whole world that he views from the cross. Cover image, from Anton Wessels, Images of Jesus: How Jesus is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).


10. “Guardians” poster of Ann Altman, Oil pastels. SCW ©1999. The poster carried an inscription from a poem by Diane Ackerman: “…I swear I will not dishonor my soul with hatred, but offer myself humbly as a guardian of nature, as a healer of misery, as a messenger of wonder, as an architect of peace…” Photocopied from Perpetual Calendar.

11. Photo of Mercy Amba Oduoye, native of Ghana, has served as visiting lecturer at Sell Oak Colleges, England, Harvard University, Princeton Theological Seminary, and at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. She is currently an independent scholar living in Ghana, and the author of Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa, and, more recently, Introducing African’s Theology. Photo from Clifford, page 123.


15. Store logo for Libreria Soluna, Calle Real de Guadalupe, 13-B, San Cristóbal de ILas Casas, Chiapas, México. (Store where Mark Taylor bought a lot of books.)

16. “Viet Nam Shall Win” poster, by René Mederos, silkscreen, 1971, Cuba. Offset, The Glad Day Press, Ithaca, NY 1972. Ho Chi Minh’s words on poster, “Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom.” By 1967 the US had 500,000 troops in southern Viet Nam, was regularly bombing the north. The war’s toll: Viet Nam – 2,000,0900 dead, 3,000,000 wounded, 13,000,000 refugees, 200,000 MIAs; US – 58,000 dead, 304,000 wounded, 1,900 MIAs. 100,000 Vietnam War veterans have committed suicide since returning home to the US. (Information and photocopy from Perpetual Calendar, cited above).
17. Photo of slot box truck taking Japanese-American children to internment center, April 5, 1942. Original caption: "San Pedro, California. Trucks were jammed high with suitcases, blankets, household equipment, garden tools, as well as children, each bearing registration tags as the last Redondo Beach residents of Japanese ancestry were moved to assembly center at Arcadia, California." Photo by Clem Albers, Courtesy of National Archives. For more information on the thousands of Japanese-Americans interred, go to http://americanhistory.si.edu/perfectunion/collection/search.asp?Page=1&Keywords=Japanese+internment&CampID=&ThemeID=&View=.

18. The duo, "Blue Scholars," Hip Hop musicians: "Aka Geo" (left), second son of Filipino-American, working-class immigrants, now works for Isangmahal arts collective and Anakbayan student sector; and "Aka Saba," Persian-American and economics major. As the group Blue Scholars, they have two major cds, The Long March (2005) and Blue Scholars (2005).


22. "The Brazilian sculptor Guido Rocha depicted his own experience of torture (and that of others) in this sculpture of the tortured Jesus. As he himself uttered a cry of pain, Rocha remembered the Christ who cried out on the cross, and this Golgotha-cry became for him THE great promise: here was a human being who, while enduring the fiercest torments, still remained fully human; who fulfilled his mission of love; who was a human being for his fellow humans right into the hour of truth. There was no break between his message and his life and death. Accordingly, to this Brazilian artist, the barely tolerable face of the dying Christ, seemingly possessed by demonic spirits, is not an image of aversion and revulsion, but a sign of hope.” From Wessels, page 8.

23. The sculptor of the crucified one by the Peruvian artist, Edilberto Merida, strongly resembles the figure of an executed guerrilla warrior. This depiction became especially well-known after it was used on the dust jacket of the American edition of A Theology of Liberation, the book by Gustavo Gutierrez. From Wessels, page 70.
24. A depiction of Jesus by A. Alphons. Head, shoulders and especially the gesturing right hand are reminiscent of the preaching Buddha. The curled form of the hair and nose are taken from the folk art of India. According to the painter, the extra large eyes which have neither pupil nor iris have been represented like this because spiritual eyes are hard to render. @ From Wessels, page 136.


Syllabus cover sheet features designs from the front covers of volumes by Dr. Blount (Cultural Hermeneutics) and by Dr. Taylor (Remembering Esperanza)