I. Course Description

What is the New Testament? Who are its authors? Why these texts? What was going on when they were written? And for whom? How are these texts read today? What happens during the process of interpretation? Does one’s context really matter? This course, which explores the New Testament texts in a broad, survey fashion, will tackle these questions (and many more!). We will read the biblical texts closely, critically, and constructively, while simultaneously doing a close reading of ourselves. We will also incorporate several types of biblical methods and lenses that are used in New Testament scholarship such as literary, rhetorical, feminist, womanist, and postcolonial criticisms (to name a few).

II. Objectives

To help students:

- Gain familiarity with the New Testament (NT) texts
- Examine biblical texts in their ancient contexts
- Examine one’s role in biblical interpretation and the factors that influence one’s reading
- To enhance and practice dialogue about biblical texts
- Critically engage and evaluate secondary scholarship (monographs, articles, essays, commentaries, etc.) by asking questions and challenging arguments based on the student’s own biblical analysis
- Discover that “context matters,” and in the process, learn how to read NT texts with theological and ethical sensitivity

III. Required Texts


IV. Recommended Texts

*The following books, all of which feed into different parts of the course, are recommended. Students may wish to purchase them for their personal libraries. These are also on reserve in the library.*


V. Course Requirements and Grades

A. Presence, Participation, and Preparation (10% of Final Grade)

Regular attendance at all class sessions and active participation in discussion groups are expected. If you are unable to attend a class session, please notify the professor in advance or at the earliest opportunity. Please plan to arrive promptly to class, and stay for its duration. *It is also important that students return promptly after class breaks.* Your presence is necessary and important for maximal learning for everyone. **Missing two sessions will result in an automatic lowering of your final grade by 10%. Missing three sessions will result in an automatic lowering of your final grade by 20%. Missing four or more sessions will result in automatic failure of the course.**
Be ready to ask questions and participate in discussions in a positive and constructive way. Rich, critical dialogue occurs when we discuss, debate, and consider the texts and various issues as a collective. Care should be taken when speaking; however, to make sure that everyone (including the less talkative ones) gets an opportunity to engage.

B. “Reading Ambiveilently” Writing Assignments (40% of Final Grade)

Students will write a total of 7 short papers.

First paper: Reflecting on the Questionnaire (10 points)

- Answer the questionnaire in full with sincerity and honesty. Some questions can remain blank if further reflection or clarification of its meaning is needed. *(For subsequent writing assignments [after the questionnaire has already been completed], revisit your answers – making changes if necessary.)*

- Write a reflection based on the questions at the end of the “Reading Ambiveilently Questionnaire.”

Remaining Papers: The weight of these papers will gradually increase over the course of the semester. Paper 2 (3 points), Paper 3 (4 points), Paper 4 (5 points), Paper 5 (5 points), Paper 6 (6 points), Paper 7 (7 points)

- Re-read and reflect on your responses to the Questionnaire, updating your responses as needed.

- Reflect and take notes on the factors that emerge as you engage the biblical text. How do they influence the way you read the text and why? What are your thoughts about this engagement? *(If the biblical passage is not pre-selected by the professor, the student will choose a passage from the assigned text of the day. Tip: Choose a passage that has the most effect on you.)*

- What is your interpretation of the text? Were you surprised at the meaning surmised? (How) might you rectify any lingering tensions within yourself, and between you and the text? What questions might you ask your colleagues about the text?

Paper specifications: Times New Roman, 12 point font, double-spaced, 2-3 pages (500-word minimum and 750-word maximum). I will not read beyond the maximum word limit.

C. Major Presentation and Handout (30% of Final Grade)

Students will do a 15-20 minute thesis-driven presentation on either a history of interpretation of a particular passage, or a major theme of a text (such as “Paul’s View of Women” or “The Gospel of Matthew and Anti-Judaism”). All presentations should be relevant to the topic of the day, and must be approved by the professor. A sign-up sheet will be distributed at the start of the semester.
Each presentation is to be accompanied by a one-page handout. The handout and presentation should facilitate the discussion of the class as a whole. The best presentations encourage discussion, and the most helpful handouts offer resources for further study. In other words, an effective presentation does not involve reading a lengthy handout to the class. Be creative, and have fun!

**See handout: “MAJOR PRESENTATION GUIDELINES” for additional instruction.**

D. Final Reflective Essay (20% of Final Grade)

Students will write a critical reflection on the process of “reading ambiveilently”—an approach to biblical interpretation that rejects the notion of reading objectively (an impossible task), and emphasizes our agency and influence as flesh-and-blood readers. “Reading ambiveilently” also helps students (re)-discover her/himself by becoming vulnerable in the interpretative task. Students will be critically reflexive about their own social location, considering how various social indicators (as per the self-inventory) affect their encounter with biblical texts and with others. Students will also discuss the knowledge and skills they believe are required for this honest and respectful engagement to occur. This reflection should include critical theories used to engage diversity and biblical interpretation in a given context (including but not limited to: race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and faith tradition).

***Reflections will also include examples of this process at work.

**Essay specifications:**

- **Length:** between 5-7 pages (1,250 – 1,750 words)
  
  *Please note: Once word limit is reached, I will stop reading.*

- Double-spaced, 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, NO justification, 1 inch margins

**Due Date:** Tuesday, December 22, 2015 by 5pm. Email your papers to: ssmith@hartsem.edu.

VI. Learning Resources and Expectations

Academic Integrity

**Plagiarism will not be tolerated** in student written work. You are expected to put your ideas in your own words. When the thoughts, ideas, or words of other persons are used, whether written or verbal, credit should be given by using quotations and proper citation. Proper documentation should also be included for sources used but not quoted verbatim. In addition, when you include small amounts of your own material from a previously submitted work, that work should be referenced appropriately. Although the latter is not “technically” plagiarism, it is treated in the same manner at this institution. For the policy and guidelines for avoiding plagiarism, see the Academic Policies for Graduate Programs section of the Catalogue or the Student Handbook.
Lateness Policy

All dues dates are real. Please meet them. If you expect to miss a deadline, please contact the professor before the due date, in order to negotiate a new due date. This new date becomes firm. Any assignments turned in after this new agreed-upon date will be docked 5 points per 24 hour period.

Language Issues

Good communication is crucial for ministry, scholarship, and collegiality. Students are encouraged to have their writing assignments reviewed by a writing consultant as needed. These services are offered at no additional cost to graduate program students (see Student Handbook for details). Students are also expected to use inclusive language in this course as stipulated by the Hartford Seminary Catalogue.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

**Please note that all readings are subject to change.
Students will be notified in advance.**

Week 1 - Wednesday, September 9: Introduction to the Course and “Reading Ambiveilently”

Students are strongly encouraged to begin reading Harris, Part Two: “The Three Worlds in Which Christianity-Originated” (pp. 39-104) to get an overview of the ancient contexts of the biblical text in preparation for our second class. (Don’t be alarmed at the page count! There are lots of charts and pictures!)


***“Reading Ambiveilently” writing assignment on the Questionnaire is due today.***

Secondary Reading:


Week 3 - Wednesday, September 23: The Gospel of Mark

***“Reading Ambiveilently” writing assignment on a passage in Mark is due today.***

Primary Reading:

- Read the entire Gospel of Mark (preferably in one sitting). It’s the shortest gospel!
As you read, pay special attention to the unfolding relationship between Jesus and his disciples – how it begins, how it develops, how it ends. (Please take notes on your findings.)

Secondary Reading:

Want More? (Not Required):

**Week 4 – Wednesday, September 30: The Gospel of Matthew and The Synoptic Problem**

***“Reading Ambiveilently” writing assignment on Matthew 15:21-28 is due today.***

Primary Reading:
- Read the entire Gospel of Matthew (preferably in one sitting)

Secondary Reading:

Want More? (Not Required):

**Student Presentation: “The Gospel of Matthew and Anti-Judaism”**

**Week 5 - Wednesday, October 7: The Gospel of Luke and Acts**

Primary Reading:
- Read the Gospel of Luke and skim Acts

As you read both texts, please pay attention to the following topics:
- The radical teaching on wealth and poverty
- The prominent role played by the Holy Spirit
- The striking emphasis on prayer
Secondary Reading:

Want More? (Not Required):


Week 6 - Wednesday, October 14: An Introduction to Paul’s Letters, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians

Primary Reading:
- Read both letters.

Secondary Reading:

Want More? (Not Required):

Week 7 - Wednesday, October 21: Galatians and Romans

***“Reading Ambireiently” writing assignment on a passage in Galatians is due today.***

Primary Reading:
- Read Paul’s brief Letter to the Galatians in its entirety.
- If possible, also read Romans 3:21-8:39.

Secondary Reading:

Want More? (Not Required):
- Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “Romans,” in *WBC*, pp. 547-556.

Student Presentation: “Paul and Homosexuality”
Week 8 - Wednesday, October 28: 1 Corinthians

***“Reading Ambivalently” writing assignment on 1 Cor. 11:1-16 is due today.***

Primary Reading:
- Read 1 Corinthians

Secondary Reading:

Want More? (Not Required):

Student Presentation: “Wildcard – 1 Corinthians Text”

Week 9 - Wednesday, November 4: Paul and (Anti-)Judaism / The New Perspective on Paul / Paul and Women


Want More? (Not Required):

Student Presentation: “Paul’s View of Women”

Week 10 - Wednesday, November 11: Colossians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Peter

Primary Reading:
- Read Colossians, Ephesians, and 1 and 2 Peter
Secondary Reading:

**Week 11 - Wednesday, November 18: The *Haustafeln* (Household Codes)**

****“Reading Ambiveilently” writing assignment on the household codes is due today.***

Primary Reading:
- Re-read Colossians 3:18-4:1; Ephesians 5:21-6:9; and 1 Peter 2:18-3:7

Secondary Reading:

***Wednesday, November 25 – NO CLASS – READING DAY!***

**Week 12 - Wednesday, December 2: The Gospel of John and the Letters of John**

Primary Reading:
- Read the entire Gospel of John (preferably in one sitting), and 1, 2, and 3 John.

Secondary Reading:

**Week 13 - Wednesday, December 9: Revelation**

****“Reading Ambiveilently” writing assignment on Rev. 17 is due today.***

Primary Reading:
- Read Revelation (paying special attention to chapters 1-7; 12-13; and 17-22).

    Pay special attention to (i.e. jot down) some of Revelation’s principal imagery.

Secondary Reading:

**Student Presentation: “Revelation and Ecotheology”**

**Week 14 - Wednesday, December 16: Quest for the Historical Jesus, Canonicity and the Task of Translation, Course Conclusion**

**Secondary Reading:**


*Your final papers are due on Tuesday, December 22, 2015 by 5pm.*