University of St. Thomas  
Center for Faith and Culture  
Theology Department  

Syllabus 2014  
Faith and Culture in Biblical Texts  

Rev. Dempsey Rosales Acosta SSL, STD

♦ Mission Statement of the University of St. Thomas

We are the University of St. Thomas, the Catholic university in the heart of Houston. We are committed to the Catholic intellectual tradition and the dialogue between faith and reason. By pursuing excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service, we embody and instill in our students the core values of our founders, the Basilian Fathers: goodness, discipline, and knowledge.

We foster engagement in a diverse, collaborative community. As a comprehensive university grounded in the liberal arts, we educate students to think critically, communicate effectively, succeed professionally, and lead ethically.

♦ Course Details

• Instructor: Rev. Dempsey Rosales-Acosta SSL, STD.
• Email: drosale@stthom.edu
• Office Hours: 7:30 am - 9:15 am, 2:00 - 5:00 pm TTH, and 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm MW. and by appointment (use the email).
• Office: Hughes House #201
• Weight/Times: 3 credits (3-0-0)

♦ Course Description

This course will focus on the study of the cultural context in which Biblical texts were originated. This approach will help the students to understand how Christians today can relate to the original cultural context as the basic background for the Biblical Interpretation. The Biblical interpretations that will be presented in this course will contextualize the relationship between
notion of God (or Divinty), Human Person, and how these two relate in the world through history.

Dei Verbum will be the first step of this course as the basic platform to the Catholic interpretative approach. Special attention will be given to the historical-grammatical method, Tradition, Magisterium, and modern Catholic Theology.

This course studies the principles of biblical interpretation applied to main themes like Matrimony, Faith, Evangelization, Community (division, dangers against the harmony, etc), Sexuality, Discrimination, Human Person, Human Life, among others. During the course we are going to apply cultural and contextual analysis of selected passages from the OT and NT. The major focus of the course is theoretical and practical. The course's goal is that the students develop sound methods of interpretation that can be applied to biblical texts in order to discern the challenges of our modern society.

Emphasis will be placed on understanding the original text (Greek and Hebrew) in order to grasp the original intentions of the biblical authors in its cultural context as the basis upon which to prepare expositions, understand the deeper significance of texts beyond their cultural embodiment, and make appropriate applications for Christian living today.

♦ Course Objectives

The didactic objectives of this course can be divided in three main dimensions: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Skills.

1) Knowledge

Students who complete this course successfully should:

• Understand the significance of Scriptural Interpretation
• Know the basic methods of biblical interpretation that have been practiced throughout history, especially in Catholic Theology
• Know important tools that may be useful in the study of the biblical text
• Know principles that guide leaders of faith to approach social problems from a critical point of view applying biblical truths to our contemporary context

2) Attitudes

Students who complete this course successfully should:

• Appreciate the complexities of the task of Interpretation
• Recognize the importance of sound principles of Interpretation
• Be more confident in interpreting biblical texts
• Discover the mystery of the sacred text that speaks to us today
3) Skills

Students who complete this course successfully should:

• Research cultural and historical background that may shed light upon the biblical text
• Prepare word studies that lead the interpreter to understand better the biblical author’s usage of special vocabulary
• Determine how the literary context affects the meaning of a text
• Derive timeless truths or absolute values from the biblical text and show how these should affect the beliefs and behavior of contemporary Christians
• Contextualize the interpretation and application of the Bible to the contemporary environment.
• Articulate an interpretation and application of a particular Biblical text

♦ Required Texts/Readings/Writing

a. A Bible (it is accepted in different languages and versions). It is recommended, if you don't have one, to buy a Jerusalem Bible, study version.

b. Various photocopied articles and handouts provided by the professor will be posted on Blackboard.

c. Writing a research Paper. This book, consisting of handouts for writing the research papers, is not available in the book store but it will be posted on the Blackboard.

d. Suggested reading of different authors will be presented in every class according to the topic. The following bibliography is recommended:


  Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002)

♦ Approach and Assessment

• The course will have four (4) major grades: each evaluation will have the value of 25% of the final grade.
• The tests are not accumulative.
• Three evaluations will be written exams, including the final test. One evaluation will be a research paper. The topic and specifications regarding the Research Paper will be posted as a separate article on Blackboard.
• The grading scale is the usual one at UST: 90, 80, 70, 60. In detail:
• **Attendance:** **IS REQUIRED.** Be prompt. After every week’s worth of absences (2 for TTH courses, 3 for MWF), a **next absence will lower your final grade one step** (B to B-, etc.). Please be punctual for class, to be present for the roll. It is your responsibility, if you are tardy, to remove an absence at the end of class **that same day.** Removal of an absence thereafter will require a written excuse on a medical agency’s Letterhead.

To be successful in this course students must demonstrate independent, critical thinking. Students are expected to come to class ready to participate meaningfully and enthusiastically in classroom activities. This requires prior completion of assigned readings. Students are responsible for knowing what is required and when assignments are due. Absences will make it very difficult to do well in this course.

• Tests must be taken at the times they are scheduled. The paper must be due on the established date. Failing to the established dates will implied a penalty. Meaning that the evaluation or paper taken out of the assigned date cannot have the value of 25%.

• If opportunities to extra-credit will be given. The extra-credit won't surpass the total value of 4% of the class grade. he extra-credits DO NOT substitute the main evaluations of the semester.

♦ **Code of Honor**

The Students in this course are expected to be familiar with and follow this basic **Academic Honor Code.** According to this code, the students of the University of St. Thomas are expected to:

• Refrain from cheating, including plagiarism.
• Refrain from lying.
• Express opinions with civility and with consideration for the opinions of others.
• Respect shared intellectual property and resources.
• Promote the importance of the honor code in all their interactions for the benefit of the learning community.
• Refrain from doing anything that will embarrass yourselves and your families.

• Everything that you do, must be for the major glory of God: **Ad maiorem Dei gloriam.**
Academic honesty and integrity is essential to the academic enterprise and the College community. All written work submitted must be your own. Guidelines for Research Writing defines plagiarism as the failure to give credit where credit is due: “To plagiarize is to give the impression that you have written something original which in fact you have borrowed from another without acknowledging that other person's work” (Guidelines for Research Writing, 2002, p. 5). If you borrow ideas or distinctive phrases, or include direct quotations in your written assignments, you must acknowledge your source(s) properly by in-text citation or footnote. It is also wrong to copy another person’s work or to submit an assignment previously handed in for credit in another course. Students guilty of plagiarism will receive a grade of zero for the assignment and will be brought to the attention of the College’s Discipline Committee.
Course Schedule and Topics: 2014

JANUARY 2014

13 M Introductory remarks and overview of the Course. The basic notions for Biblical Interpretation: Dei Verbum

15 W The basic notions for Biblical Interpretation: Hermeneutics. principles, concepts, methodology: Historical critical approach to the Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium

20 M Continuation

22 W Different currents of interpretation of Scripture today: Liberation Theology, Feminist Interpretation, Homosexual Interpretation, Postcolonial Interpretation, African Interpretation, and African American Interpretation.

27 M Continuation

29 W Modus Operandi of Paul in Lukan Theology: a perspective of integration and inclusion of humanity to the Christian message

FEBRUARY 2014

3 M Continuation


10 M Continuation

12 W The Johannine Communities: 2 and 3 John: problems of divisions among the proto-Christian communities.

17 M Continuation


24 M 1st Exam

26 W Continuation

MARCH 2014

3 M Biblical dimension of sexuality and ancient Semitic anthropological vision: man and woman. Grounds to interpret different sexual ethics postulated today.

5 W Continuation
Exodus 20:13: "Thou shalt not kill". OT and NT Morality. The problem of killing, Death penalty, Abortion, Physician-assisted Suicide.

Continuation.  

Research paper due

Continuation


2nd Exam

APRIL 2014


Continuation

Continuation

Holy Week: no classes

Psalm 22: The problem of the Abandonment of God.

Continuation

The Christian and the Political Order: OT and NT dimension of political authority. Responsible participation in Democratic Government: 1Peter and the Book of Revelations.

Continuation

MAY 2014

Final Exam: TBA

Place: Present Classroom