

**THEOLOGICAL METHOD AND HERMENEUTICS**

Instructor: Thomas E. Reynolds  
tom.reynolds@utoronto.ca  
(416) 585-4544

Meeting times: Wednesday 9:00-11:00

“Theological understanding is not a theory or invention, something wafted into existence by the theologian’s magic wand. It names a dimension of the life of faith itself, the understanding required of faith as it exists in various life contexts...”

Edward Farley

“... there are no facts, only interpretations.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

“Hermeneutics operates whenever what is said is not immediately intelligible.”

Hans-Georg Gadamer

**Course Description**

This course examines resources and methods in constructive theological reflection, focusing on hermeneutics as a strategic way of thinking about the role of texts and traditions in doing theology. Attention is given to philosophical and contextual interpretation theories in conjunction with liberal, postliberal, and postmodern theological methodologies. The aim is to better understand how theological sources, processes, criteria, and aims are determined and become reflected in specific theological formulations—for instance, regarding the character of faith, authority, revelation, rational reflection, social justice, cultural contexts, intercultural and postcolonial dynamics, and religious pluralism.

**Required Texts** (available at Crux Books)

- Caputo, John D. *Philosophy and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006)
- Gustafson, James M. *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003)
- Porter, Stanley E. and Jason C. Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011)
- Schreiter, Robert J. *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005)
- Westphal, Merald. *Whose Community, Which Interpretation? Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009)

Other required readings shall be available on library reserve or provided online at the class website on the Portal.

## Recommended Texts

- Frei, Hans W. *Type of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992)
- Mueller-Vollmet, Kurt, ed. *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Continuum, 1988)
- Reynolds, Thomas E. *The Broken Whole: Philosophical Steps Toward a Theology of Global Solidarity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006)
- Tanner, Catherine. *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997)

## Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this class, students should be able to...

1. Articulate key components in theological reflection.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of methodological questions and issues in theology.
3. Discuss in some depth the character of hermeneutics, both philosophical and theological.
4. Identify approaches and developments in hermeneutical theory, noting theological applications.
5. Convey the salient features of (and differences between) liberal, liberation, feminist, postliberal, and postcolonial theological hermeneutics.
6. Appreciate the importance of context and culture for constructive theology.
7. Display familiarity with postmodern, intercultural and pluralist challenges for theology.
8. Consider theological reflection as a vehicle for promoting right relations and for cultivating shalom.
9. Explore in greater analytic detail aspects of theological method and be able to explain basic choices for interpretation, including evidences and ranges of uncertainty/ambiguity in referencing them.
10. Exhibit the capacity to participate as a citizen in a theological community:
  - demonstrating empathetic and critical thinking in reading, speaking, and writing...
  - communicating responsibly, carefully, and clearly...
  - framing and developing theological arguments supported with evidence...
  - showing an awareness of oneself as an interpreter...
  - displaying a tolerance for ambiguity while remaining genuinely committed

## Class-Time Format

The basic arrangement of time in class will be that of lecture-presentation-discussion. Mainly, the course will operate in a seminar format, oriented toward discussing texts and themes in an interactive and open environment. Lectures will be offered occasionally to introduce, help clarify, and expand the context and substance of topics/materials. Class presentations from students will provide a way to introduce the readings and ask key questions to generate discussion (see Course Requirements, below, for more information).

## Course Requirements and Assignments

1. Class Attendance and Participation.....	25%
2. Class Presentation.....	25%
3. Research Paper.....	50%

1. *Regular attendance and informed participation* in class is an important part of the learning experience. Because discussion is a key part of the class, nurturing an engagement with course materials, your questions and comments are valued and will be a factor in the overall grade. Readings for each class will be discussed on the basis of student questions and classroom interaction in response to presentations and/or lectures. To this end, it is expected that you will have done the readings, critically reflected upon them, and be prepared to contribute substantively. Careful reading is fundamental to informed participation. More than three absences may result in loss of course credit.

2. *Class Presentation.* At each class session, one or more students, by pre-arrangement with the instructor, will initiate discussion by referring to salient points in the week's reading assignments and raising two or three questions to generate conversation over important issues/themes in readings. The student(s) should address the class for approximately twenty minutes.

3. *A final research paper,* 20-25 pages in length, is due no later than Tuesday, December 15. This paper should focus on a topic or issue germane to the course and investigate, analyze, and appraise its implications for theological method and hermeneutics. The assignment is both integrative and research oriented; it offers the flexibility to research a topic or issue of interest to the student, while also requiring the student to assess the relevance of the research to some of the materials read/discussed during the semester, drawing conclusions in the process. It should thus explore in greater analytic detail at least one aspect of theological method and be able to explain the interpretive choices made in the process.

Paper assignments should be clearly organized, well-documented, critical in scope, substantive in analysis and in assessing materials, careful in formulating evaluative claims, and prudent in applications. Excellent papers will not simply 'state' but 'show' their case. Based upon an informed consideration of what is at stake, excellent papers will provide reasons for claims and back up these reasons with solid evidence, noting the ranges of uncertainty and/or ambiguity in referencing them.

Papers should observe Emmanuel College academic regulations and policies, and note the "Other Qualities Expected of Students" in "The T.S.T. Grading Scale Used at Emmanuel College" for criteria for evaluation of assignments (found in 2006-07 edition of *Handbook of Information for Basic Degree Students*). More information about writing papers can be found at the web site "Writing at the University of Toronto" at [www.utoronto.ca/writing/](http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/).

## **Specific Policies**

*Grading:* Grades will follow the TST grading scheme. See TST web site or BD Handbook.

*Email assignments:* Emailed assignments will **not** be accepted except in rare cases with the prior permission of the instructor

*Accessibility and disability policy:* See the UT web site:

<http://www.sa.utoronto.ca/details.php?wscid=4>. It is your responsibility to register with accessibility services. If you need any special accommodation, please let me know before or in the first two weeks of the course.

## Tentative Course Schedule

### Week One / September 16: Introduction: Why Method?

—no readings.

### Week Two / September 23: What is Hermeneutics? How is it Theological?

- Required Reading:
  - Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*—ch. 1
  - Westphal, *Whose Community, Which Interpretation?*—Preface, ch. 1
- Recommended Reading:
  - Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969)—ch. 2, “*Hermeneuein* and *Hermeneia*: The Modern Significance of Their Ancient Use.”

### Week Three / September 30: Hermeneutics: Philosophy and Theology

- Required Reading:
  - Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology*—chs. 1-4
- Recommended Reading:
  - Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2007)
  - Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), ch. 8

### Week Four / October 7: Hermeneutics—Widening Trajectories: Schleiermacher and Dilthey

- Required Reading:
  - Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*—ch. 2
  - Westphal, *Whose Community, Which Interpretation?*—chs. 2-3
  - Friedrich Schleiermacher, selections from *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (Continuum, 1988)—ch. 2
- Recommended Reading:
  - Palmer, *Hermeneutics*—chs. 7-10
  - Reynolds, *The Transformation of Tradition into History* (online)

### Week Five / October 14: Hermeneutics—Philosophical Trajectories: Heidegger, Gadamer

- Required Reading:
  - Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*—chs. 3-4
  - Hans-Georg Gadamer, selection from *The Hermeneutics Reader*—ch. 9
  - Westphal, *Whose Community, Which Interpretation?*—chs. 6-9

- Recommended Reading:
  - Thomas E. Reynolds, *The Broken Whole*, ch. 3

Week Six / October 21: Hermeneutics—Philosophical Trajectories: Habermas, Ricoeur

- Required Reading:
  - Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*—chs. 5-6
  - Jürgen Habermas, selection from *The Hermeneutics Reader*—ch. 10
  - Paul Ricoeur, selection from *The Hermeneutics Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, eds. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990)—ch. 12, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology”
- Recommended Reading:
  - Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Habermas and Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2011)
  - Gary M. Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002)
  - Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976)
  - Dan R. Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 2001)

(Reading Week: October 26-30)

Week Seven / November 4: Hermeneutics—Philosophical Trajectories: Postmodernity

- Required Reading
  - Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*—ch. 8
  - Michel Foucault, from *Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Book, 1984)—“Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” 76-100
  - Westphal, *Whose Community, Which Interpretation?*—ch. 5
  - Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology*—chs. 5-8
- Recommended Reading:
  - Thomas E. Reynolds, *The Broken Whole*, ch. 2
  - John D. Caputo, from *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997)—ch. 1, “Deconstruction in a Nutshell—The Very Idea”

Week Eight / November 11: Theology and Hermeneutics: Barth, Bultmann and Newer Horizons

- Required Reading
  - Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*—ch. 9
  - Rudolph Bultmann, selection from *The Hermeneutics Reader*—ch. 8 (reserve at Emmanuel)
  - Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992)—chs. 3-4

- Recommended Reading:
  - Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992), chs. 1-5, 9, 15
  - Rudolph Bultmann, Roger Johnson, ed., *Rudolph Bultmann* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), ch 6, “Jesus Christ and Mythology,” pp. 288-328
  - R. Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology” (pp. 1-44) and “On the Problem of Demythologizing” (pp. 95-130), in *New Testament and Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1984).

Week Nine / November 18: Post-liberalism, Narrative Theology, and Theological Hermeneutics

- Required Reading:
  - Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*—ch. 10
  - George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984)—chs. 2, 6
  - Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Berkman and Michael G. Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001)—chs. 8-9, 13
- Recommended Reading:
  - James M. Gustafson, “Just What is “Postliberal” Theology,” in *Christian Century*, 116/10 (March 24-31, 1999): 353-355.
  - William C. Placher, “Being Postliberal: A Response to James Gustafson,” in *Christian Century*, 116/11 (April 7, 1999): 390-392.

Week Ten / November 25: Liberalism: Re-engagement with a Worldly Hermeneutics

- Required Reading:
  - James M. Gustafson, *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt* (entire)
- Recommended Reading:
  - Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*—ch. 4
  - William C. Placher, et. al., “A Forum on ‘An Examined Faith’: Doubting Theology,” in *Christian Century*, 121/13 (June 29, 2004): 25-36

Week Eleven / December 2: Liberationist Hermeneutics

- Required Reading:
  - *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)—Introduction and ch. 1
  - Clodovis Boff, “Methodology of the Theology of Liberation,” in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, eds. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996)—ch. 1
  - Marcella Altheus-Reid, et. al., *Controversies in Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2007)—ch. 2, “Myths Surrounding Feminist Theological Hermeneutics”
  - Dorothea Erbele-Küster, “Rereading the Bible: A Dialogue with Women Theologians from Latin America, Africa, and Asia,” in *Exchange*, 32/4 (October 2003): 310-321
  - Mary Ann Tolbert, “Defining the Problem: the Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics,” in *Semeia*, no 28 (1983): 113-126.

- Recommended Reading:
  - Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*—ch. 6

Week Twelve / December 9: Cultural and Postcolonial Theological Hermeneutics

- Required Reading:
  - Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*—chs. 1-5, 7
  - Segovia, Fernando. “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora: A Hermeneutics of Otherness and Engagement” in *Reading From This Place*, Vol. 1 (Segovia and Tolbert, eds. 1995)
  
- Recommended Reading:
  - Catherine Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997)—chs. 2-4.
  - Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005)—ch. 1
  - Letty M. Russell, “Cultural Hermeneutics: A Postcolonial Look at Mission,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 20/1 (Spring 2004): 23-40.



**Theological Method and Hermeneutics**  
*Select Bibliography*

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- Brown, Delwin. *Boundaries of Our Habitations: Tradition and Theological Construction*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Caputo, John D. *On Religion*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000.
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