The following syllabus is the teaching and learning guide for the last time this course was taught. It will give you a good idea of the descriptions of the course, how it was taught, the reading, the papers and other assignments, the intended outcomes, and the workload. By examining this syllabus and others, you will be able to form an impression of what graduate theological education at Phillips Theological Seminary requires of students.

Due to periodic curriculum revisions, course names and/or numbers may be different on this syllabus than what the name and/or number of the current offered course may be.

This syllabus is provided for your information only. The faculty reserves the right to revise the curriculum, and each professor reserves the right to decide how best to meet the learning goals of the curriculum. Therefore, the following syllabus is an historical artifact rather than a promise of how the course will be taught in the future, or that the course will be taught again.

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Syllabus

The Gospel of Mark

This course reads the Gospel of Mark as a document of the first and 21st centuries. It invests equally in both the investigation of the life of this text in the first century Mediterranean and the interpretation of the text for the 21st century. Relative to both centuries the course focuses on the meaning of the text.

The course approaches the Markan text with confidence in its complex and sophisticated composition and incisive meaning-making, accessible to both ancient and (post) modern readers. In order to understand the ancient compositional and meaning-making merit of Mark, a relatively wide range of other ancient primary texts and secondary historical and literary studies are consulted in the course. In order to understand Mark’s meanings for the 21st century, the course primarily consults a range of artistic works from the 20th and 21st century. Although some other portions of the New Testament are consulted in this course, the main emphasis on Mark’s ancient meanings does not include its “biblical” status, but rather students are encouraged to read Mark on its own ancient terms (rather than as necessarily part of the Bible). Indeed, Mark’s 21st century meanings are also so striking and evocative that they also can stand and perhaps better stand apart from other biblical meanings.

Class sessions concentrate mostly on a mix of mini-lectures, class discussion, individual meditation and prayer, artistic interactions and events, and—most of all—textual study. All class members are expected to participate actively in class discussion. Because of the strongly interactive character of class sessions, students are reminded to take notes on the class, even though much of each class session does not entail the professor lecturing. For students who tend toward introversion or who simply may get lost in the largeness of the class, class participation credit may be earned by either Moodle entries or direct email to the professor. Due to the intense character of the class sessions themselves, very little work outside of class is required during March 16-20. (See below for a list of all course assignments.) All major assignments are due after the classwork is completed. Students are encouraged to be in touch with the professor during the four weeks following the week of classwork.

Course Reading. For class March 16, 17, 18, and 19, students must read the entire Gospel of Mark, and be ready to present thoughts and questions about their reading of the Markan text itself. Please note that reading the entire Gospel of Mark before the initial class is the only pre-course assignment required.

The only additional reading required during March 16-20 is the (relatively short) Kotrosits/Taussig book, Re-reading the Gospel of Mark Amidst Loss and Trauma. It is probably
to the advantage of students to read the book as soon during the March 16-20 week as soon as possible, but it is also fine to split the reading of the book over the evenings of March 16, 17, and 18. Since the book is only purchasable at a reduced rate on March 16, it is not possible to assign this book before the course starts, but it is on reserve in the library. Students should not think about buying the book on line because of its prohibitive cost.

Students need to read substantial portions of Burton Mack’s *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* and *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus*. It is recommended that both books be purchased and both will remain valuable resources for the next decade. Reading Mack, pp 1-24 and Myers pp. 3-38 can help for initial orientation prior to the course. Both books provide strong and thorough general historical and literary background for the study of Mark, and can be used as the first line of research for course assignments. It is expected that students will have read both books, as well as Kotrosits/Taussig before writing the major papers in the course.

**Course Assignments.**

Students are to prepare *two in-class presentations and one beyond-class paper of 10+ paper relating a particular Markan text (not shorter than a periscope and not longer than a chapter) to a particular 21st century situation of loss, trauma, and/or pain*. The first in-class preparation helps exercise students abilities to work with this dual focus on a Markan text and a 21st situation of loss, trauma, and/or pain. The second in-class preparation allows students time to work on Thursday with the professor for the Friday morning session in which each student will present a five minute presentation for the class. This second in-class presentation may use a variety of media and must be 5-6 minutes in length. The paper itself on the same topic/textual range is due April 2 and is meant to be a fuller elaboration of the task. For each stage of these interlocking assignments the student needs to have a different Markan text and a different 21st situation of loss, trauma, and/or pain.

Students have their *choice between a 6+ page paper on first century meanings of a Markan pericope of their own choice or on a 21st century political or economic reading of a Markan pericope*. The paper is due on April 9.

Students are to write *a 8+ page paper on the Gospel of Mark in relationship to one of the following artistic works: Dash Shaw’s graphic novel, Bottomless Bellybutton; the sculptures of Louise Bourgeois; Courtney Hunt’s film Frozen River; David Fincher’s Fight Club; or James Marsh’s film Man on Wire*. Bases for thinking about these artistic works in relationship to Mark can be found in the Kotrosits/Taussig book *Re-reading the Gospel of Mark Amidst Loss and Trauma*. The paper is due on April 16.

**Grading.**

Grading will be based on: 30% student participation in class time, Moodle, and other ways of a student participating in the course which can be negotiated with the professor due to introversion or
shyness; 5% first in-class presentation on Markan text and situation of loss, trauma, and/or pain; 10% second in-class presentation on Markan text and situation of loss, trauma, and/or pain; 20% paper on Markan text and situation of loss, trauma, and/or pain; 15% April 9 paper; 20% paper on Mark and artistic work.

The professor is aware of the contingencies of grading and encourages students to discuss with him any questions of evaluation and grading. The professor is certain that all professors make mistakes in evaluation and grading, and is willing to change grades after discussion with students, but does not do so without serious consideration.

**The Numbers.**

Students are encouraged to be in regular contact with the professor. Hal Taussig will be available for appointments on Monday after class, Monday evening, Tuesday before class, Tuesday after class, Tuesday evening, Wednesday before class, Wednesday after class, Wednesday evening, Thursday before class, and Thursday at lunchtime. The numbers are: Union Theological Seminary office: 212-280-1486; email: hal@haltaussig.org; home phone: 215-242-0611, ext. 1; home mailing address: 8008 Winston Rd., Philadelphia, Pa. 19118; Union Theological Seminary address: Pit box 241, Union Theological Seminary, 3041 Broadway, New York, New York 10027.