Interpretation of the bible is an act of discipleship in the church. Modernity has seen a myriad of critical approaches to the bible that have renewed our attention to scripture in ways that are, at once, delightful, confusing, and irreplaceable. The last generation or two in theology has also seen an effort to return to more principally theologically informed approaches to scripture that incorporate the gifts of historical criticism without sundering our link to the memory of the church. This course will look at some of these “post-critical” approaches to scripture. We will constantly evaluate what each writer thinks ails biblical interpretation, what she or he thinks its remedies might be, and how these approaches to scripture might renew the life of the worshiping community.

Key questions for the course include these

- How does the church discern Christ in the scriptures—especially in the Old Testament?
- How does the church appropriate the insights of historical criticism alongside the treasures from the ancient church without competition between them?
- How does our theological tradition inform the way we read scripture without overwhelming it?
- How do we determine a “good” reading from a “bad” one? That is, what is the telos of the reading of the bible?
- What form of life makes for good reading of the bible?

Course Expectations

As a 600 and 700 level course this one will include a great deal of reading with which you will be expected to keep up weekly. You will also kick off discussion in class once or twice as time allows. In this role you will deliver a short paper, written out for 4 pages or so double-spaced, that will introduce the book for seminar that week, highlight its thesis in its strength, point out possible questions or objections, and set a trajectory for the conversation to follow.

M.Div/MA students will turn in a final research paper of 12-20 pages; Th.M students a paper of 20 – 30 pages. This paper will include attention to post-critical issues among our contemporary theological conversation partners. It will also include some attention to pre-modern figures doing actual exegesis of the bible. This will not remain a mere academic exercise—biblical interpretation lives in the worship and embodied life of the church. Your thesis then should include some attention to how the church ought to read for the sake of its faithful life now. There is flexibility in the content of this paper. I’d love to see a paper that compares two figures—one ancient and one modern—on a specific text. Or a paper that tackles theology and science with a particular eye to that conflict’s impact on theological exegesis. Or a paper that finds surprising overlap between, say, a certain liberationist perspective and a pattern of interpretation from medieval women. Your interests should guide.
Required Readings

Books


Andrew Louth *Discerning the Mystery* (Wichita Ks: Eighth Day Press, 2007). The key text of the class.

Essays


Nicholas Lash *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986), especially the essays “Performing the Scriptures” and “What Might Martyrdom Mean.”

Jon Levenson *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies*. 188 pp Jewish perspective


Recommended books


Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2008). 148 pp. Levering is a quite conservative Catholic, a convert from nominal Methodism/Quakerism in the US.


Russell Reno, *Genesis* in the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010).


Joseph Trigg, *Origen* (SCM 2012) 280 pp