

His/Th6/715 Theology and Biblical Interpretation  
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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 worshipping 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

Gary Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002). 280 pp. Catholic perspective w appreciation for Orthodox & Judaism.

Augustine *On Christian Teaching* Trans. R.H.P. Green (Oxford World Classics, 2008).

Bonhoeffer *Life Together & Prayer Book of the Bible*. Vol. 5 of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Augsburg Fortress 2004). 234 pp.

Ellen Davis, *Biblical Prophecy: Perspectives for Christian Theology, Discipleship, and Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2014) 250 pp

Karlfreid Froelich *Sensing the Scripture: Aminadab's Chariot and the Predicament of Biblical Interpretation* (Fortress, 2014), 176 pp.

Michael Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2010). 169 pp

Peter Leithart *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Baylor University Press, 2009). 209 pp. A quite conservative Reformed perspective informed by post-modern hermeneutics and Anglican liturgy.

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

### Essays

Lewis Ayres, "On the Teaching and Practice of Christian Doctrine," *Gregorianum* 80, no. 1 (1999): 33-84.

Stephen Fowl, "Vigilant Communities and Virtuous Readers," in *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2008).

Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), part 1, pp 7-46.

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

David Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Precritical Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Stephen Fowl (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

### Recommended books

J. Todd Billings *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). Another Reformed perspective somewhat different from Leithart's.

John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 1991). 474 pp

Jason Byassee *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 304 pp. Truth in advertising—this book is out there and contains what I think on these matters as of 2005.

Natalie Carnes *On Beauty: A Theological Engagement with Gregory of Nyssa* (Eugene Oreg.: Cascade, 2014). Baptist perspective on an ancient leading light claimed principally by the Orthodox (but he belongs to all of us!). 282 pp.

Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 384 pp.

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.

John J. O'Keefe and Russell R. Reno *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Johns Hopkins, 2005). 140 pp

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

David C. Steinmetz *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002). A Methodist historian writing with sympathy about Luther and interpretation.

Joseph Trigg *Origen* (SCM 2012) 280 pp

Rowan Williams *On Christian Theology* Part 1 "Defining the Enterprise" (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000). 60ish pp Anglican perspective from the former Archbishop of Canterbury