

His/Th6/715 Theology and Biblical Interpretation

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Fall 2020 Tuesdays 9-11:50 AM

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?

This course can be taken as an upper level MA/MDiv course or a ThM course. Prerequisites: any two of the following: TH500 and either HB500 or NT500.

## Required Readings

**Books** (available at the UBC bookstore or at your friendly online book dealer)

Stephen Fowl, ed. *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997). I’m really going to require the essays in the first 100 pp., and then students will choose one section of essays from among four in the final 300 pp.

Melissa Florer-Bixler, *Fire by Night: Finding God in the Pages of the Old Testament* (Herald, 2019).

Robert W. Jenson *The Triune Story: Collected Essays on Scripture*, ed. Brad East (Oxford, 2019).

Dale Martin *Biblical Truths: The Meaning of Scripture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (Yale, 2017).

Jon Levenson "Exodus and Liberation," in *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 127-160.

Andrew Louth "Return to Allegory," in *Discerning the Mystery* (Eighth Day, 2007).

Michael Cartwright "Ideology and the Interpretation of the Bible in the African-American Christian Tradition," *Modern Theology* (April 1993): 141-158.

Robert Wilken, "Seek His Face Always," in *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (Yale, 2005), 50-80.

David Yeago "Getting the Gospel Uttered: Robert W. Jenson as Seminary Teacher," paper delivered at the Pro Ecclesia Conference 2018, on Canvas.

### **Competencies**

1. Accurately summarize the thought and evaluate the strengths of a monograph or article addressing issues of theology and biblical interpretation.
2. Articulate responses to readings that 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.
3. Discuss and evaluate post-critical hermeneutical issues among contemporary theologians in dialogue with pre-modern practitioners of biblical exegesis.
4. Reflect critically on how the church ought to read for the sake of its faithful life now.
5. Grow to see pre-modern exegetes as your companions and dialogue partners as you interpret scripture for the church's life today.

### **Assignments**

#### **In-class contribution** (50% of final grade)

1-Each student will also kick off discussion in class once or twice as time allows. In this role you will deliver a short introduction to our reading for the day and offer 3-4 questions that we should discuss as a class. Don't plan to talk for more than 15 minutes.

2-Each student will present in class a theological exegesis of one of the four texts on which Fowl's reader focuses (Exodus 3, Isaiah 52-53, Matthew 5-7, or Romans 9-11). Feel free to add to the sources in Fowl but you don't have to do so. Offer a theological engagement with the text (not just a historical critical one), ask what God is saying through it now, in light of the traditional sources you've read and any extra you would like to add. Each presentation should be no more than 15 minutes. Present either Nov 3, 10, or 17.

3-Each student will present in class on a theological interpreter or interpreters of your choice on what they add to the conversation. Be sure to include the person's ecclesial or religious investments, how these shape their reading, and make a case for them—why should the rest of us attend to your interpreter? Please choose your interpreter early enough that we can add an essay for the others to read in time for class. Nov 24, Dec 1, or Dec 8.

**Paper** (50% of your grade).

MA/MDiv/certificate students:

1-You will turn in a final research paper of 12-20 pages.

or

2-You can design a sermon series around your approach to theological exegesis, preach the first sermon, and send it to me digitally.

ThM students: You will turn in a final research 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.

**Schedule**

September 15 Intro

September 22 Florer-Bixler chapters 1-5

September 29 Florer-Bixler chapters 6-11 (she's with us 9 am)

October 6 Fowl intro essays by de Lubac, Steinmetz, and Wimbush

October 13 Jenson pp 59-145, Yeago article on Canvas about Jenson

October 20 Jenson pp 146-240

October 27 no class—reading week

November 3 Jenson pp 241-346. 1<sup>st</sup> of the presentations on scripture.

November 10 Fowl essays by Camp, Lindbeck, and Yeago. Second set of scripture presentations.

November 17 Martin pp 1-110; final set of scripture presentations

November 24 Martin pp 111-220. First set of other biblical interpreters

December 1 Martin pp 221-end. Second set of other biblical interpreters

December 8 Final theoretical essays (Louth, Cartwright, Wilken, Levenson), final set of other biblical interpreters, conclusions

December 18 final paper due (unless otherwise negotiated)