

Sacred Texts and Traditions, Spring 2017
Interpretation of the New Testament : Academy and Culture
Tutor: Charlotte Naylor Davis, PhD

The New Testament texts are ancient texts, but also sacred texts being used, applied and called upon every-day in political and ethical discourse. How then should one read and understand these documents? The aim of this module is to show how understanding of the New Testament has developed over time; to teach skills of critical engagement with the texts as both ancient and modern documents; and to engage with sacred texts as academic and cultural documents.

Using the New Testament texts as examples this module will lead the student through key issues in the history of critical interpretation, and engage the student in different reading methodologies applicable to the study of ancient and sacred texts. The module will focus on both the interpretation of scripture in the academy and wider culture, placing art and literature within the discussion of how sacred texts are received by communities and the populous, and encouraging the student to understand the effect of historical academic study on the interpretation of the NT in a wider context.

In focussing on specific NT texts it will develop critical reading skills including but not limited to: exegesis, rhetorical criticism, historical critical skills and engagement with ideologies surrounding New Testament interpretation. It will also present artistic criticism as a further way of understanding the impact of these texts on culture and society.

By the end of the module the student will have explored the history of biblical interpretation and be able to identify major methods in the development of biblical hermeneutics.

The core texts for this course will be the letters of Paul and the Gospels. In class these will be further narrowed to 1 Corinthians and Galatians, and texts from Matthew and Mark. However, students should be familiar with the wider New Testament canon.

There is reading as preparation for every week: Please refer to the course structure to find out what is required for a particular week. You may also be given handouts in class. It is the students job to make sure they are prepared for class discussion – if you have trouble getting hold of materials contacts me as soon as possible.

Assessment: Assessment will take place throughout the course in 4 formats: A critical article review, two exegetical essays on biblical texts and a short oral presentation to the class.

Please refer to the final pages of this document for guidance on assessment tasks.

Course aims and objectives

Teaching Aims :

- To give a good background to the formation of the New Testament and the texts in their ancient context.
- To strengthen awareness of the different ways in which the Bible has been both interpreted and received within the academy and wider culture.
- To enable reflection on different hermeneutical approaches toward the bible and other sacred texts.
- Use exegetical skills appropriately in critical evaluation.

- To enable reflection upon the role of ideology and theology in the interpretation of texts.
- Evaluate critically the interdependence of sacred texts and the communities which use them.
- Analyse the reception of biblical texts in music and art

Transferable skills:

- An ability to engage in a close reading of texts
- The ability to read critically and discuss ideas
- The ability to analyse and evaluate critically both one's own and others' ideas, including the work of scholars
- Planning, testing and appropriately modifying personal ideas, views and attitudes
- Communicating both orally and in an appropriate written form
- A capacity to construct and present an argument, using evidence, coherent reasoning and critical reflection.
- An ability to use commentaries, critical articles and books in the engagement with ancient texts.
- Finding bibliographical resources and using them appropriately in research

Core Texts

The Bible – The New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised Edition)

Please use the **NRSV** as your text for this course. It is a critical edition of the Bible. Study bible or annotated version of this translation are acceptable. Bring your Bible to every class!

Johnson, Luke Timothy., *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, SCM Press (Canterbury, 2009)

Barton, John (ed)., *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, 1998)

Wider Bibliography

Alter, Robert *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, George, Allen and Unwin. (London, 1981)

Barton, J., *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (CUP, 1998);

J. Barr, *Fundamentalism*, , SCM Press. (London, 1977)

Davies, P. *Whose Bible is it Anyway?* Sheffield Academic Press. (Sheffield, 1995)

Coleman, John. A., 'The Bible and Sociology' in *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 60, No 2 (Summer, 1999) pp.125-148 Oxford University Press.

Exum, J.C. *Plotted, Shot and Painted*. Sheffield Academic Press. (Sheffield,1996)

Hayes, J.H and Holladay, C.R, *Biblical Exegesis: a Beginner's handbook* SCM (London: 1987)

Moyise, Steve., *Introduction to Biblical Studies.*, Bloomsbury (New York, 2013)

Neufield, Dietmar and DeMaris, Richard E. (Eds.), *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament.*, Routledge Press (New York, 2010)

Sanders, E.P *Paul* Oxford University Press (Oxford: 1991)

Throckmorton, B.H, 1992, *Gospel Parallels: a Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc 5th ed)

Wood, Charles M., 'Scripture, Authenticity, and Truth' in *Journal of Religion*, Vol.76, No 2, (April 1996) pp.189-205

COURSE STRUCTURE

Section 1

WEEK 1 -16th/ 18th Jan

Introduction to sacred texts:

what is this book/books? Issues of canonisation; issues of translation; what is a text and what makes it sacred? Why study the bible critically at all?

WEEK 2 -23rd/25th Jan

Reading ancient texts – exegetical skills and tools: a practical session on using commentaries, understanding critical apparatus, using translations, reading interpretation.

Texts:

Gospel of Matthew and Gospel of Mark (Please read at least one of these to be able to take part in class discussion)

WEEK 3 - 30th Jan/ 1st Feb (ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE)

Living the ancient world – Visit to the British Museum

Section 2 – sessions 4-7 How to read

4 and 5 -*Historical critical approaches: Paul, his letters and their content*

6 and 7 – *Literary approaches: reading the gospels*

WEEK 4 – 6th/8th Feb

The New testament in its first century context: The New Testament in historical discourse

Texts:

1 Corinthians and Galatians (please read at least one of these to be able to take part in class discussion)

Johnson, pp 23-40

WEEK 5 -13th/15th Feb

Using historical information on culture, language, sociological data of the 1st century in textual interpretation.

Texts:

1 Corinthians - specifically 1 Cor 4, chs 8-10 – Please read these passages in detail thinking about the preparation reading questions given in class.

Barton in *Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, pp 9-22

Johnson, pp 295-324

WEEK 6 – 20th/22nd Feb (ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE)

Texts:

Galatians – it isn't a long book, please do a careful and close reading of the letter.

Whitelam, K 'The Social World of the Bible' in Barton, *Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, pp 35 -49

Johnson, pp 327 -339

WEEK 7 -27th Feb/1st March

Gospels – What is a gospel?

The synoptic problem, canonical readings, the OT in the NT

Texts:

One set out of :

Matthew 13:18-23; Mark 4:13-20; Luke 8:11-15

OR

Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17

Johnson, pp 155-158

Johnson, pp 187-207

WEEK 8 -NO SESSION

Term Break

WEEK 9 - 13th/15th March

Narrative and literary criticism

Texts:

Matthew 1 -2

Mark 16

Johnson, pp159-181

Handout: Mark without chapters.

Section 3 – sessions 10-14 -Ideological, Cultural and artistic approaches to texts.

WEEK 10 - 20th/22nd March (ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE)

Visit to the British Library

WEEK 11 - 27th/19th March

20th and 21st methods of interpretation

Feminist and Ethical Approaches to texts

The marginalised in the ancient world and today

Texts:

1 Corinthians 7 and 11;

John 4 –the woman at the well

The sermon on the mount/ Matt 25

Loades, Ann ‘Feminist Interpretation’ in Barton, *Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, pp 81-94

WEEK 12 – 3rd/5th April

Politics and the gospel

This lecture will include a class debate on the political use of the bible – please refer to the handouts given at the previous session.

Texts:

Today's lecture will require preparation by watching a video of a lecture by Lloyd Pietersen on Anarchist readings of the bible. Romans 13 – <https://videopress.com/v/jxvX7qQW>
Lloyd Pietersen 'Anarchist Readings of Romans 13' from the 'Dead Letters and Living Words' Conference, Newman University, 2015.

The text is Romans, but the method and introduction are applicable to all our texts.
Please watch the video and TAKE NOTES – Do you think this type of reading makes sense?
Can we apply the bible in this way? *Should* we apply the bible to modern political or ethical debates?

Please also read **one** of the handouts given in class

WEEK 13 - 10th/12th April

the bible in music and film

Texts:

Bach – St John Passion

Handel – Messiah Oratorio

Metallica – Creeping Death

Article: Johnny Cash and the Bible

WEEK 14 - 17th/19th April

the bible in literature and art

Texts:

Please refer to the handouts given in class

WEEK 15 and 16 - 24th/26th April and 1st/3rd May

Oral Presentations

Assessment tasks

Tasks are to be written to the prescribed length with footnotes and proper citations. The word count includes a 10% leeway over or below (i.e. on a 2000 word piece you may submit between 1800 and 2200 words no more no less).

Assessments may be handed in electronically or in hard copy but must be with me or my inbox by the end of class on the day the assessment is due. Penalties will apply.

You are expected to follow the word count.

There is a basic marking criteria on Blackboard and a more detailed one to follow. You must fulfil these elements to get an A in this class, including good grammar and correct citation of work.

You are expected to reference material correctly as per the Fordham University Academic Integrity Policy. This can be found here

http://www.fordham.edu/info/22218/essential_resources/3030/academic_integrity_policy

Plagiarism is any presentation of work OR IDEAS without proper citation and credit given to the author/origin. The difference between plagiarism and getting an A for research is good citation. It is your responsibility to make sure that you have read and follow the policy.

RESOURCES

Critical engagement with texts requires reading the text itself and a number of other sources – articles, commentaries etc. These are available via a number of methods including your own college library and e-journals, ATLA, JSTOR and the Heythrop Library which is on site. Though you cannot remove books from Heythrop the library there is extensive in Biblical studies and critical theory. I encourage you to use it to your full advantage. If you choose to use google to research please be very wary of the source of biblical commentary – it is not just using some critical engagement that matters but the quality of the source.

If you have problems accessing resources please speak to me as soon as possible. To get a high grade in this class you need to use a number of resources

Task (A) Critical Article Review (1000-1500 words) - Due week 3

The first short task element will involve a **Critical Article Review** (2-3 pages). Students are to choose ONE article from ONE of the following listed books, in consultation with the module tutor. However, **you are required to read all three**.

Reading them is part of the assignment as it will get you familiar with this type of scholarly article. It will also give you more material to reference in your article review.

The articles focus on questions surrounding the nature of the Bible or its use:

Anderson, B.W. ‘Tradition and Scripture in the Community of Faith’ in *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 100, No.1 (March 1981), pp 5-21

Stendahl, K. ‘The Bible as Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture’ in *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 103, No 1 (March 1994), pp 3-10

Smith, D.M. ‘When Did the Gospels Become Scripture?’ in *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 119, No. 1 (Spring 2000), pp 3-20

These articles will be made available in hard copy as well as online via resources such as ATLA and JSTOR

Please refer to the guidelines below for further information on how to successfully complete this task.

1.a. The first coursework task is a ***critical article review*** (2-3 pages). The aims of asking you to do this are: to help you to analyse an article; present a substantiated evaluation of an argument; familiarise yourself with some of the subject matter on critical methods of biblical interpretation; practice your writing skills. **To complete this task successfully you will need to take account of the following:**

- Your audience: Assume an intelligent general reader, without specialist knowledge. (It will therefore be necessary to define technical language, in particular your chosen author’s definitions of particular terms).
- Give a clear, accurate synopsis of the article, **not** the story line. How is the piece structured? State briefly the main points of interest; how are they presented? How do you assess the author’s argument?
- Note in particular the *themes* covered by the article. Does the author clearly explain the method(s)/idea(s) in question? How do you assess the author’s argument overall?
- What did **you** think of the article? Would you recommend it? If so, for whom?
- Bring in a brief comparison with another approach/point of view. You have access to other material on the same topic which could provide points of comparison. How far do you think the work achieved its objectives?

Please pay attention to referencing – all quotations and scholars ideas must be cited correctly.

N.B.

You may find it helpful to familiarise yourself with a range of critical book reviews in Theological Journals (such as JBL, JSNT, JSOT, Heythrop Journal, CBQ, SBL) to help you decide how to structure your review.

[See the range at the Review of Biblical Literature Website www.bookreviews.org]

Do not exceed the word limit of 3 pages.

Do not limit yourself: if you have read relevant material outside of my bibliographies (which are very brief) include it.

2 – ESSAY (2000 words)- Due week 6

The purpose of this assignment is to carry out a close exegesis of a biblical text. Choose one of the texts below and using the **tips on exegesis handout** given in class, and the commentaries available to you write a critical exegetical discussion on the text. We will have talked about various methods of close reading, particularly historical critical methods of analysis. Keep these in mind.

Text choices:

1 Corinthians 1:10-16

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

1 Corinthians 12:12-28

3 – ESSAY (2000 words) –Due week 10

The purpose of this assignment is to carry out a close reading of a biblical text using one of the methods of analysis we have talked about in class. Choose one of the texts below and using the tips on exegesis handout given in class, and the commentaries available to you write a critical exegetical discussion on the text. Remember to state the method you are using.

Texts:

Matthew 4:1-11

Matthew 9:18-26

Mark 12: 1-12

Assessment 4 – PRESENTATION AND WRITTEN ACCOMPANIMENT – Final two weeks of term (TBA)

Prepare a presentation for the class on one of the following areas. You may be as creative as you like in presentation. The written accompaniment should however include bibliography and references, and a written analysis of the work you presented.

EITHER

- a) Present a critical/analytical appraisal of the use of a biblical text in a piece of art/music/film/literature.**

In doing this you should consider the following elements:

- i) The context of the biblical passage within the wider text – use commentaries to note the literary or historical context of the passage and academic understandings of the ‘meaning’ of the text.
- ii) The context of the work of art – what is its purpose or aim? What is its historical or ideological context?
- iii) How is the biblical text used – is this an interpretation? A form of exegesis? A reflection?
- iv) In what way is the hearer/ reader/ observer of this piece guided to encounter the text? Is this similar or different from the original biblical setting?

Make sure that you are critical in your evaluation of the work and that you consider the biblical passage and how it is USED in the work you are evaluating.

OR

- b) Present a critical/ analytical appraisal of the use of a biblical text as the basis for a **political, ethical or theological position**.

In doing this you should consider the following elements:

- i) The context of the biblical passage within the wider text – use commentaries to note the literary or historical context of the passage and academic understandings of the ‘meaning’ of the text.
- ii) Is the text being read in light of other biblical passages?
- iii) What is the wider ideology surrounding the use of this text? Does this contrast with a traditional interpretation of this biblical passage or does it use the historical reception of the passage as justification for its use in this way.
- iv) Is the reader/hearer/consumer encourage to put this text into a practice in some way? Does that make sense when seen in light of its biblical context.

Make sure that you are critical in your evaluation of the use of the text as a basis of political, ethical or theological points of view

CONTACTING YOUR PROFESSOR

My name is Charlotte Naylor Davis so my email is c.naylordavis@fordham.edu

I shall office hours for one hour before lecture and one hour after, unless by prior arrangement.

I shall respond to emails within a normal working week unless by prior arrangement. If you wish to contact me about a class and need a response it must be done the day before as I travel in on the train and do not have access to email the morning before class. If you need an immediate and urgent response please contact Fordham as they can get me by other means and are better resourced to help you.