

THE BIBLE: CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES

OUTLINE

This module introduces students to the contemporary art of reading the Scriptures. To live is to interpret. There is no such thing as a pure event which speaks for itself. This is true also for the Scriptures which came down to us through the centuries in the life and interpretations of communities of faith. Taking account of the history of these traditions as well as the emergence of critical approaches in this area in the late 18th and 19th centuries, students will acquire knowledge of principal methods of contemporary critical approaches to the Bible as tools to highlight specific aspects of our readings in the contemporary context.

Particular attention will be paid to the fact that in the area of Biblical Interpretation the hegemony of the historical methods for interpretation has been increasingly challenged over the last twenty years from various perspectives. A vast variety of approaches have been developed which can be broadly divided into 'historical' and 'literary' approaches. A basic difference which can be found between them lies in their differing assumptions about the relationship between texts and history.

Historical methods such as source criticism, form criticism, tradition-historical criticism, and redaction criticism emphasize the historical, archaeological, or literary *backgrounds* of a text and the development of a text *through* time. Historical-critical methods are thus also referred to as *diachronic readings*. Historically oriented approaches tend to regard the intention of an author as an important element in the process of what a text meant originally as well as for what it means today. Literary methods such as narrative criticism, reader-response criticism and post-critical approaches focus rather on *the text* in its final form, the variety of textual elements and their relationships, as well as on the interaction between text and readers. Literary approaches are thus also referred to as *synchronic readings*. Distinct from historical approaches, authorial intention is often viewed as irretrievable or irrelevant to the interpretative process.

This broad distinction to some extent finds expression in the structure of this module, in that units 3 and 4 introduce the student to historically orientated approaches to the Bible, whereas unit 5 provide introductions to more literary orientated approaches. Although this distinction is helpful to some extent, it also has its limitations in that a number of methods and an even greater number of scholars cannot be easily listed under one or the other category. Many scholars use a combination of historical and literary approaches rather than being 'theoretical pur-

ists'. And some critical approaches, such as rhetorical-critical, feminist or post-colonial approaches do not easily fit the one or the other category, but include a number of aspects of both categories. Thus, in units 6–9 approaches 'from both sides' are included, whereas unit 10 provides an outlook on the significance of the ethical dimension in any particular approach.

Structure

The module contains ten units which guide the student from a general awareness of interpretation and its hermeneutical presuppositions to the peculiarities of some of the most important contemporary approaches and their significance.

Each unit consists of:

- an introduction to the unit
- a list of 'Essential Readings'
- a list of 'Further Readings' (if you wish to read more about a particular topic)
- activities which help you to understand what you have read

You are expected to have access to the two main text books J. Barton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and P. Goeder, *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 2008).

It is anticipated that you work through each unit sequentially making full use of all the material provided with this module.

Unit 1	Assessment Details
Unit 2	Biblical Interpretation and Hermeneutical Presuppositions
Unit 3	Historical-Critical Approaches
Unit 4	Social-Scientific Approaches

Unit 5	Literary Approaches
Unit 6	Contemporary Contextual Approaches I: Feminist Interpretation
Unit 7	Contemporary Contextual Approaches II: Postcolonial Interpretation
Unit 8	Post-Critical Approaches
Unit 9	Jewish Interpretation
Unit 10	The Ethics of Reading

Aims

- To develop a critical awareness of the hermeneutical presuppositions that shape biblical interpretation.
- To further develop students' understanding of contemporary critical approaches to the Bible.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the module the student should be able to:

- Critically evaluate current research and advanced scholarship in biblical interpretation.
- Evaluate methodologies and their hermeneutical presuppositions and critically interact with them on their own terms.
- Offer a comprehensive understanding of the methods of interpretation as practised in contemporary biblical research.
- Display the ability to apply contemporary methods of interpretation in an informed way.

Bibliography

Essential

- Barton, J. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- Brown W. P. (ed.), *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007)
- Court, J. M. *Biblical Interpretation: The Meanings of Scripture – Past and Present* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2003)
- Davies, E. F. and R. B. Hays (eds), *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003)
- Ehrensperger. K. *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged: Feminism and the New Perspective in Pauline Studies* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004)
- Gooder, P. *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 2008)
- McKenzie S. and S. R. Haynes (eds), *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticism and Their Application* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999)

Recommended

- Brenner A. and C. Fontaine (eds), *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997)
- Brueggemann, W. *The Book That Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005)
- Collins, J. J. *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2005)
- Coggins, R. J. and J. L. Houlden (eds), *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1990).
- Cotterell, P. and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1989)
- Crossley, J. G. *Reading the New Testament: Contemporary Approaches* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010)
- Dungan, D. L. *Constantine's Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007)
- Eskenazi T. *Levinas and Biblical Studies* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003)
- Esler, P. *The First Christians in Their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific Approaches to the New Testament* (London and New York: Routledge 1994).
- Fewell, D. N. *Bible and Ethics of Reading (Semeia 77; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997)*
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- Horrell, D. G. *Social Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999)
- Jasper, D. *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004)
- Levenson. J. *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993)
- Levine, A.-J. and M. Z. Brettler (eds), *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- Malina, B. *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (London: SCM Press, 1981)
- Marguerat, D. *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- Powell, M. *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993)
- Schüssler Fiorenza, E. *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999)
- Soulen, R. N. and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Fourth Edition; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011)
- Yarchin, W. *History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2004)