

THEO 5911 Contextual Interpretation of the Bible

2017-18; 2nd semester

Monday evenings: 7:00-9:15 pm

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Course Description

This course begins with the development of biblical interpretation in the western academic scholarship, and tracks how contemporary social, political, historical, cultural, philosophical and theological disciplines respond, resist and engage these interpretations from various contexts. Special emphases are given to different approaches and methods of interpretation, which were developed with insights and influences from modern literary and critical theories, social sciences and humanities, and various inter-disciplinary approaches.

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge Outcomes

The student will

1. learn different methods in biblical interpretations (with emphasis on the Hebrew Bible): their presuppositions, methodological questions, characteristics etc.
2. examine the presuppositions, methods and contemporary contexts of interpreters.
3. study the development of how resistant biblical interpretation arose in cultures and now studied in academia today.
4. analyse the different approaches and methods employed in #3.
5. evaluate all of the above to Hong Kong various contexts and the communities that may be affected by the western interpretation.
6. learn what different contexts mean by engaging particular communities through the field trips and reading assignments.
7. construct new (i.e., contrary to commonly held interpretation) interpretation of a specific biblical text for a particular context in Hong Kong or according to the student's place of origin.

Attitude Outcomes

The student will

1. appreciate the long history of biblical interpretation developed from the west and how it has impacted different cultures across the globe.
2. reflect on how biblical interpretation becomes a political tool for domination and marginalization as well as a spiritual resource for salvation.
3. inculcate respect for individuals of particular contexts in how they read and interpret the Bible because of their different contexts.
4. become sensitive to how a stance of biblical interpretation may marginalize communities.

List of Topics

1. Biblical interpretation in the western scholarship
2. New Literary Criticism in Biblical Interpretation
3. African Contextual Biblical Interpretation
4. Post-colonial Biblical Interpretation
5. Interpretation of the Bible for Disabilities

6. Ecological Interpretation of the Bible
7. Interpretation of the Bible for Marginalized Communities

Learning Activities

Apart from lectures, we will have field trips and group learning activities where we interact with different communities on how Bible interpretations affect their lives.

List of Topics

Topics	Contents
New Literary Criticism	This topic covers how biblical studies adopted new literary criticism for biblical interpretation. It introduces some of the methods used for recent biblical interpretation in academia, such as: rhetorical criticism, structuralism, materialist or political criticism, psycho-analytic criticism, reader-response criticism, and deconstructionism.
African Biblical Interpretation	This topic not only deal with how African contextual biblical interpretation develops, it also addresses why biblical interpretation in context becomes one of social justice in the light of the effects and consequences of western biblical interpretation.
Ways to do Contextual Interpretation	This topic introduces different ways where contextual interpretation can take place, and in particular in Chinese contexts. Cross-textual hermeneutics and interpretation will be introduced and another example of how reading with marginalized communities can further re-interpret the biblical contexts besides the attempt to reclaim justice.
Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation	This topic introduces how biblical studies employs the theories of postcolonial studies and applies them on biblical texts. More importantly, the topic deals with the necessity of it.
Ecology Biblical Interpretation	This topic introduces how biblical scholars press the urgency of the issue of ecology and attempt to read the bible for ecology. We will look into the various approaches and hermeneutical tasks.
Disabilities Interpretation of the Bible	This topic covers the emergence of this interpretation, discusses the development of some of the approaches and methods and studies how scholars are exploring ways to carry out this task.
Field Trips 1-3	This topic allows students to engage the task of Biblical interpretation with a community. The students appreciate first hand how communities perceive the stories and words of the Bible

Course Components:

The course consists mainly of lectures, interwoven with class discussion, independent reading, educational excursion, and research activities. The time allocation (on average per week) of the learning activities is as follows:

Lecture		Class discussion		Excursion/ Web-based repot		Reading and research		Written assignments	
In class	Out of Class	In class	Out of Class	In class	Out of Class	In class	Out of Class	In class	Out of Class
1.5 hrs	NA	0.5-1 hr	NA	0.5-1 hr	0.5 hr	NA	3 hrs	NA	2 hrs
M		M		M		M/O		M	
M: Mandatory activity in the course					O: Optional activity				

Required Texts

1. The Hebrew Bible and New Testament.
2. Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2003).
3. Essays/Articles/Book listed in the Course Schedule below.

Assessment Scheme

Task Nature	Purpose	Learning Outcomes
A. Reading based assignments: 1. 10% Reading Log Complete Required Reading list found under Course Schedule and the biblical passages/books. Submission date: 24th April 2018	To ensure students have a general grasp of the various topics to be covered.	1. Acquire an overview of the general contents for the course. 2. Comprehend the general scholarship concerning each topic.
Please fill in the given Reading Log accordingly and you may scan it and upload it to Blackboard for submission. There is no need to upload this file to Veriguide.		
2. 30% Book Review and Reflection Paper from one of the recommended books listed below Final submission date: 24th April 2018	To help students build a foundation to understand the topic of interest within this course. To provide a basis for further self-directed studies.	1. Comprehend the general subject matter related to the topic. 2. List ideas that are novel and of interest and relevant for the student. 3. Construct implications of the ideas presented in the text. 4. Evaluate the ideas and implications in the light of the whom (the community) the student has contacted.
Select ONE of the recommended books listed below and compose this Paper. The papers should be structured accordingly as follows: Within 2000 words (including footnotes), cover the following 4 areas accordingly. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Summarize in a paragraph the purpose of the book (do not exceed 100 words). (b) List at least 2 ideas in the book you find significant (i.e., make a lot of sense), that you have not thought of before. Explain why. (c) List at least 2 ideas, thoughts or statements in the book where you either disagree, or struggle to come to terms with (e.g., you find hard to apply to in 		

<p>your context). Explain why.</p> <p>(d) Evoke the principles or ideas from the book, and think deeply how can it benefit another marginalized group which the book is not addressing, but whom you have encountered in the field trips.</p> <p>Make sure you put in the footnotes where needed and supply a list of bibliography at the end of the paper. Make sure your footnotes are accurate in content and format (see Student Supplement for the <i>SBL Handbook of Style</i>, 2nd ed. uploaded in Blackboard).</p> <p>You must submit this piece of assignment to Veriguide. Please refer to <u>Academic honesty and plagiarism</u> below.</p> <p>Recommended Books:</p> <p>R.S. Sugitheraiah, <i>Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice</i> (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). [PC]</p> <p>Matthew J.M. Coomber, <i>Bible and Justice: Ancient Texts, Modern Challenges</i> (Oakville, CT/London: Equinox, 2011). [BJ]</p> <p>Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper (eds.), <i>Disability Studies and Biblical Literature</i> (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). [DSB]</p>		
<p>B. Research Assignment</p> <p>1. Presentation 35%</p> <p>1.1 Group Project</p> <p>Presentation of Contextual Reading with a Specified Community;</p> <p>or</p> <p>1.2 Individual Essay</p> <p>Presentation of a Postcolonial Interpretation of a bible passage for Hong Kong.</p> <p>Final submission date: On the day of presentation.</p>	<p>For 1.1:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To enable students to have a hands-on experience of reading a biblical text with a community. 2. Team work enables students to help each other to construct and think through the interview questions carefully. <p>Alternatively, for 1.2:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To enable students to study the historical backgrounds of the selected biblical passage and Hong Kong. 2. To enable students to study and examine structures of oppression and resistance related to colonialism and proffer interpretations of the biblical passage that are meaningful for Hong Kong's struggle at the current situation. 	<p>For 1.1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Study about the community. 2. Study the selected text and evaluate the significant and relevant question for the community. 3. Study how conventional and western scholarship often present the text and consider what new insights the community might contribute to the text. 4. Learn to work as a team to support and contribute equally to the interview. <p>Alternatively, for 1.2:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Study more in-depth the resources on the historical and current political backgrounds of both the biblical passage and Hong Kong. 2. Examine and select concepts in postcolonial studies and how they may be applied, or be integrated to ideas of the biblical passage. 3 Think deeply how relevant can structures of oppression and resistance be, and their

		distinct cultural responses are or could be. 4. Create a novel interpretation of the biblical passage for Hong Kong's unique situation.
<p>You have the option here to select the Group Project (1.1) or the Individual Assignment on the Postcolonial Interpretation of a selected passage for Hong Kong (1.2). Please see below for the different requirements for each assignment.</p> <p>1.1: You are to work closely with the teacher on the selection of bible passages and the interview questions. The teacher will guide you through the process and its final output.</p> <p>A full written documentation of the interview must be submitted on the day of presentation. The Class presentation should not take more than 20 mins. It should compose of the following components:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brief explanation of the community you engaged and the sample group. 2. Brief presentation of the biblical text and the interview questions. 3. Select 2-3 items the community raised or reacted during the interview that strikes you as inspirational, surprising or out of your expectation. Explain why and how. 4. Conclusion: What have you learned from this engagement with the community? 5. Take Q n A from the class. <p>1.2 Select a bible passage or book, and study the historical background, determining the imperializing/colonial powers and how and where there are dissent voices of resistance in the text. Expose these structures of oppression and resistance at the same time, employing concepts from postcolonial studies. Compare these structures to those facing Hong Kong right now and attempt to integrate and proffer an interpretation that makes meaning for the Hong Kong people. Be specific if you can. E.g., on the issue of identity or land. You should consult recommended commentaries to help you appreciate the historical background, and also the general meaning of the text. Through the lens of postcolonial reading, proffer a new interpretation of the biblical text for Hong Kong.</p> <p>This essay should be within 3,200-3,800 words including footnotes. Make sure your footnotes are accurate in content and format (see Student Supplement for the <i>SBL Handbook of Style</i>, 2nd ed. uploaded in Blackboard). Provide a bibliography at the end.</p> <p>Present the main gist of your paper. Tell us that historical background of the bible passage and which postcolonial concepts you have selected and how your new interpretation is. Take Q n A from the class. Since this is an individual work, your presentation should not exceed 15 mins.</p> <p>Please see below on <u>Academic honesty and plagiarism</u>.</p>		
<p>2. 15% Reflection Report on the Project</p> <p>Final Submission Date: 20th April 2018</p>	<p>For 1.1: Allow students a platform to express their experience on whole process of the engagement with the community.</p> <p>1.2: Allow students a platform to reflect on their exercise – and consider how the concepts they have employed might be</p>	<p>For both 1.1 and 1.2: Compel students to think deeply on the implications of power structures and the Bible and how they engage and affect prejudice, conflict and reconcile communities.</p>

	applicable to the way Christians exercise their claim on “authority of the Bible” to other marginalized communities in society.	
<p>In not more than 1,200 words, reflect on the following ideas and share your insights:</p> <p>For 1.1: How has biblical authority shape Christians to appreciate marginalized groups and their place in society? What has your experience inform you about the problem of Biblical authority and interpretation, social engagement and what is biblical interpretation and justice?</p> <p>For 1.2: Reflect on those postcolonial concepts you have employed in your essay and consider how they might be applicable to the way Christians exercise their claim on “authority of the Bible” to other marginalized communities in society today? What are the problems of claiming Biblical authority for Christians and their interpretation of it that affect the way they engage in society? What insights have you learned about Biblical interpretation and justice?</p>		

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. In the case of group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible should there be any plagiarized contents in the group project, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed directly or indirectly to the plagiarized contents.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide. The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submission. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

Feedback

Students are welcome to give their feedback to the teacher throughout the course. There will be a final Evaluation conducted by the University at the end of the course.

Course Schedule:

Jan 8 Introduction to the Course.
 New Literary Criticism and Developments

David Clines and Cheryl Exum, “The New Literary Criticism”, in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Exum and Clines (JSOTSup, 143; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 11–25. (Note the recommended readings for each method. Although there are more updated readings, some of these are now considered classics.)

- Jan 15 African Contextual Biblical Interpretation.
Gerald West, “What (Socially Engaged) Biblical Scholars Do?” in *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 63–78.
Philip Chia, “Biblical Studies in the Rising Asia: An Asian Perspective on the Future of the Biblical Past,” *Sino-Christian Studies* no. 12 (2011): 33–65.
- Jan 22 Ways to do Contextual Interpretation.
Archie C.C. Lee, “Scriptural Translations and Cross-textual Hermeneutics,” in Felix Wilfred (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2014), 121–34.
Nancy N.H. Tan, “Hong Kong Sex Workers: Mothers Reading 1 Kgs 3:16–28,” in Gale A. Yee and John Y.H. Yieh, *Honouring the Past, Looking to the Future: Essays from the 2014 International Congress of Ethnic Chinese Biblical Scholars* (Hong Kong: Divinity School of Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2016), 157–78.
- Jan 29 Post-colonial Interpretation of the Bible 1
R.S. Sugitharajah, “Postcolonialism,” in *PC*, 7–30.
- Feb 5 Post-colonial Interpretation of the Bible 2
Archie Lee, “Returning to China: Biblical Interpretation in Postcolonial Hong Kong,” *Biblical Interpretation* 7.2 (1999): 156–73.
Kwok Pui-Lan, “Response to Archie Lee’s Paper on ‘Biblical Interpretation in Postcolonial Hong Kong,’” *Biblical Interpretation* 7.2 (1999): 182–86.
- Feb 12 Post-colonial Interpretation of the Bible 3
Musa Dube, “Postcoloniality, Feminist Spaces, and Religion,” in Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-Lan (eds.), *Postcolonialism, Feminism & Religious Discourse* (NY/London: Routledge, 2002), 100–120.
- Feb 26 Field Trip #1: Ecology and the Bible
J.W. Rogerson, “The Old Testament and the Environment,” *BJ*, 147–57.
- Mar 5 Field Trip #2: Interview with the Refugees in Hong Kong
- Mar 12 Field Trip #3: Interview with the Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong

- Mar 19 Disabilities Interpretation of the Bible
Susan Ackerman, "The Blind, the Lame, and the Barren Shall Not
Come into the House," in *DS*, 29–46.
Michael Gill, "Introduction: Sexual Ableism Exposed," *Already Doing
It: Intellectual Disability and Sexual Agency* (Minneapolis/London:
University of Minnesota, 2015), 1–22.
- Mar 26 Bible and Justice for the Marginalized Communities
Yvonne Sherwood, "On the Genesis of the Alliance Between the Bible
and Rights," in *BJ*, 13–42.
- Apr 9 Presentation #1
- Apr 16 Presentation #2 and Conclusion