

CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE: A Course Outline

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Teaching Assistant: TBA **Office Hours:** By Appointment

Location: YIA LT7 **Time:** Saturday 9:30 AM to 12:15 PM

Course Code: THEO 5911 **Chinese Title:** N/A

Course Description: Since the rise of postmodernity in the field of the humanities, biblical interpretation has begun to question the dominance of scientific, or historical critical interpretations of early Christian texts. This has meant, in general, a greater emphasis on methodologies that emphasize the cultural values and contextual perspectives of the reader themselves, typically in terms of local identities which provide a lens to interpret the bible in new, fresh ways. While some traditionalists oppose the shift towards reader-centered or contextual approaches to biblical interpretation, we may observe the many ways in which the bible may now be used as a tool for political liberation, opening the discipline up to previously overlooked groups and subjectivities. This course takes seriously the assumption that every act of interpretation is, already, contextual, and seeks ways integrate a spectrum of subjective approaches in a critical, scholarly manner.

This course offers a survey of a variety of types of contextual biblical interpretations, which include: a general introduction to post-Colonial/decolonial biblical interpretation, Liberation Theology, Asian Hermeneutics, African American Hermeneutics, Latino/a biblical interpretation, Queer/LGBT2 interpretation, Bible and Critical Theory, Canonical Readings, Bible and the Poor, and Feminist biblical interpretation. The goal of this course is to see how contextual readings of the bible can augment traditional historical critical (European) scholarship, while providing valuable tools of resistance in the context of non-European communities.

Course Outcomes:

- 1) Reflect critically on the relationship between historical critical approaches to biblical interpretation and colonial dominance in the modern period. Understand how historical critical approaches have typically reflected Eurocentric ways of knowing in modernity.
- 2) Develop a general understanding of the variety of contextual approaches to biblical interpretation, with more advanced knowledge of one type of approach that will serve the interest of the student in future studies.

- 3) Analyse the intersections of contextual interpretive approaches as they relate to each other according to a variety of political, economic, and social factors (for example, one can be both Black and a Feminist reader at the same time).
- 4) Hypothesize about the future role of contextual biblical interpretation in the process of decolonization in Hong Kong and elsewhere.

Course Textbook:

Sugirtharajah, R. S. *Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Course Syllabus (Weekly Mandatory Reading Schedule):

Week One (January 14th): Why Contextual Biblical Interpretation?

“Writing a Biography of Jesus in an Age of Nationalism.” Halvor Moxnes, 17–37 in *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism: A New Quest for the Nineteenth Century Historical Jesus*.

“The Bible in the German Empire.” Joerg Reiger, *The Oxford Handbook of Post-Colonial Biblical Interpretation*.

Week Two (January 28th): Decolonial Biblical Interpretation

Banazak, Gregory Allen, and Luis Reyes Ceja. “The Challenge and Promise of Decolonial Thought to Biblical Interpretation”. *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts, Cultural Histories, and Contemporary Contexts* 4 (1):113-27 (2008).

Contextualization and the Old Testament: Between Asian and Western Perspective, Jerry Hwang, (read Chapter 2—Language, Bible Translation, and Contextual Theology)

Week Three (February 4th): Liberation Theology

A Theology of Liberation. Gustavo Gutierrez, 1–46.

“Theologies of Liberation” Roberta Goizueta, in *Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*.

Week Four (February 11th): African American Biblical Interpretation

“Interpreting Black Scholarship for the Black Church Tradition” in *The Stony Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, Thomas Hoyt, 17–39.

The Cross and the Lynching Tree. James Cone, 1–29.

Week Five (February 18th): Latino/a Biblical Interpretation (Guest Speaker Miguel de la Torre)

“Reading Readers of the Fourth Gospel and Their Readings: An Exercise in Intercultural Criticism” in *What is John?* Fernando Segovia, 237–278.

Reading the Bible from the Margins. Miguel De La Torre, 1–54.

Week Six (February 25th): Asian Biblical Interpretation

"She Stood In Tears Amid the Alien Corn': Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority", Gale Yee, 119–140 in *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism.* Randall C. Bailey, Tat-Siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia, eds. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009.

What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics? Reading the New Testament. Tat-Siong Benny Liew, 1–56.

Week Seven (March 4th): Queen/LGBTQ biblical interpretation

“Postcolonial Biblical Criticism and Queer Studies” Jeremy Punt, in *The Oxford Handbook of Post-Colonial Criticism.*

Queer Readings of the Centurion at Capernaum: Their History and Politics by Christopher Zeichmann, 1–17, SBL Press, 2022.

Week Eight (March 18th): Bible and Critical Theory

Jesus and the Politics of Mammon. Hollis Phelps, 1–44.

Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism. Alain Badiou, 1–39.

Week Nine (March 25th): Canonical Biblical Interpretation

The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction, Brevard Childs, 1–34.

The Character of Christian Scripture: The Significance of a Two-Testament Bible, Christopher Seitz, 27–93.

Week Ten (April 1st): Feminist Biblical Interpretation

“Postcolonial Biblical Criticism and Feminist Studies” Susanne Scholz in *The Oxford Handbook of Post-Colonial Criticism.*

In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, 1–63.

Week Eleven (April 15th): The Bible and the Poor

“The Bible and the Poor: a New Way of Doing Theology” Gerald West, 159–183 in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*.

“Reading the Bible with the Poor: Building a Social Movement, Led by the Poor, as a United Social Force” 21–52 in *Reading the Bible in an Age of Crisis: Political Exegesis for a New Day*.

Week Twelve (April 22nd): Conclusion and Summary topics

Course Components: Lecture, interactive tutorials, online class discussion, student presentations, guest speaker

Blackboard Course Address:

https://blackboard.cuhk.edu.hk/ultra/courses/_180097_1/cl/outline

Assignments and Course Assessment

1. **Tutorial and Class Participation (20% of Final Grade):** students are expected to attend and participate respectfully in all class discussions. Students will be graded on factors including attendance, preparedness with class readings, quality of oral contributions, regular and respectful dialogue on Blackboard, and original insight. Students will be given a discussion question on the Blackboard course page and must respond to the question with one response by 11:59 PM on Friday night before the lecture the next day. There will be 12 online discussion questions for the semester, each worth 1%. The final 8% of this category will be for in-person discussions and participation.
2. **Book Review and Presentation (35% of Final Grade):** Students are required to submit an academic style book review no more than 1250 words in length, on a book that is listed in the course bibliography, or another book that has been approved by the Professor. Sample academic style book reviews will be offered to use as an example. Students will be required to present the contents of the book in the form of a presentation to the class, the presentation will be no longer than 15 minutes. Students are encouraged to use a variety of presentation medias including power point or other types of visual software. The presentation should effectively summarize the main thesis of the book, along with salient points that engage the class on the topic of Contextual Biblical Interpretation. The presentation may offer points of criticism, along with highlighting the strengths of the work in a supportive, collegial manner. Presentations may also compare the book to other similar books in a way that synthesizes material for other students. Advanced students should consider a recent publication, in the event that they may want to publish the review later in their doctoral studies.
3. **Academic Essay (45% of Final Grade):** Students will be required to submit a 5000 to 6000 word essay on the topic of contextual biblical interpretation, with an emphasis on exegeting a particular passage of the Bible (Old or New Testament). It should be clear to

the reader how a particular context (Feminist, Asian, etc.) provides a new vision of the passage, something that perhaps was overlooked in previous historical critical approaches. What is the new understanding that “contextual biblical interpretation” has offered the reader? Essays should contain an introduction, a clear methodology section, an exegetical section, and a conclusion section outlining possible intersections with other contextual approaches. Proper footnoting and bibliography are required according to the Chicago Manual of Style (17th Edition).

Structure of the Class: the first 30 minutes of the class will be split into tutorial groups, where students will be able to discuss the readings for the week. Professor will guide the discussions by providing two discussion questions at the beginning of each tutorial group. From 10:00 AM to 11:30 AM, there will be a formal lecture from the Professor. Beginning in week three, there will be three student book presentations from 11:30 AM to 12:15 PM each week.

The course readings (other than the textbook) will generally be given on the Blackboard site, along with courses grades, Professor feedback, and written submission guidelines.

Academic honesty and plagiarism: Attention is drawn to University’s 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. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration. 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 receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

Grading: The grading follows the general grading policy of the CUHK outlined below (in short form):

Grade A / Excellent: Outstanding performance on ALL learning outcomes. Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would surpass the normal expectations at this level and typical of standards that may be common at higher levels of study.

Grade A- / Very Good: Generally outstanding performance on all or almost all learning outcomes. Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would fully fulfill the normal expectations at this level and occasionally reaches standards that may be common at higher levels of study.

Grade B / Good: Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance. Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or

skills learned in the course in a comprehensive manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level.

Grade C / Fair: Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes. Demonstrates the ability to partially apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would meet the basic requirement at this level.

Grade D / Pass: Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes. Addresses the task inadequately by meeting the basic requirement at this level only in some areas while responding minimally with possibly tangential content in others.

Grade F / Failure: Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements. Fails to address the task and likely does not understand the assignment, perhaps completely misses the point.

	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement	Unacceptable
Thesis	A clear statement of what is being proposed or argued in the paper.	The thesis is easily detectable after reading the paper, but it is not presented in a single and clear statement.	The thesis is present, but a reader must work hard to reconstruct from the entire paper.	There is no thesis or central argument/proposal to tie the paper together, or the thesis is unclear.
Arguments	Each reason, support, or argument to follow the thesis is made clear, thorough, relevant and convincing. Proper references are consistently made to the text in question (biblical and/or a textbook) to show why the proposed thesis is valid.	Arguments made to support the thesis are clear, but less thorough, relevant, and/or convincing. References are often made to the text in question (biblical and/or a textbook) to show why the proposed thesis is valid, but this is done not as consistently.	Arguments made to support the thesis are acceptable but sketchy or their relevance unclear. Some references are made to the text in question (biblical and/or a textbook) to show why the proposed thesis is valid.	Arguments to support the thesis are missing, irrelevant, or not convincing. The paper makes lots of claims or assertions that are not substantiated. There are few or no references to the text in question (biblical and/or a textbook) to show why the proposed thesis is valid.
Counter-Arguments	The paper acknowledges, anticipates, and accounts for conflicting evidence, counter-examples, counter-arguments, and/or opposing positions, even ones that are not obvious or not yet been made in writings of others.	The paper acknowledges and accounts for obvious conflicting evidence, counter-examples, counter-arguments, and/or opposing positions.	The paper acknowledges and accounts for a few obvious conflicting evidence, counter-examples, and counter-arguments, but miss other obvious opposing positions. Or the paper acknowledges counter-arguments without accounting for them.	No awareness or acknowledgment of conflicting evidence, counter-examples, counter-arguments, or opposing positions.

Organization	The paper's flow, from one paragraph to another, is consistently sensible, logical, and always with clear transitions. The movement from introduction to the body and then the conclusion is easy to follow and coherent.	The paper's flow, from one paragraph to another, is largely sensible and logical. Transitions are mostly appropriate. The movement from introduction to the body and then the conclusion is distinguishable if not easy to follow.	There are signs of sensible and logical organization, but these are mixed with abrupt or illogical shifts and ineffective flow of ideas. The movement from introduction to the body and then the conclusion is not clearly distinguishable.	The paper does not flow well in terms of organization or for the argument of the thesis. Transitions from paragraph to paragraph or from one idea to the next are missing. The movement from introduction to the body and then the conclusion is non-existent.
Style	The paper is written in complete and grammatically correct sentences. Word choice is precise; definitions are provided if and when needed. Paper has been spell-checked, proofread, and contains no errors.	The paper is written in complete sentence and grammatically correct sentences. Word choice is understandable, definitions are generally (though not always) provided if and when needed. Paper has been spell-checked, proofread, and contains only a few errors.	The paper contains some incomplete or grammatically incorrect sentences. Word choice is imprecise, at times not understandable, and/or not defined when needed. Not clear if the paper has been spell-checked and proofread because of the number of errors present.	The paper is written with many incomplete or grammatically incorrect sentences. Word choice is not understandable and definition of particular terms or words is not given even when needed. The paper has clearly not been spell-checked or proofread, and hence contains an excessive number of errors.
Documentation	Notes to indicate sources of information are given whenever they are needed. Both notes and bibliography use consistent and academically acceptable format.	Notes to indicate sources of information are generally given when they are needed. Notes and bibliography are generally but not always consistent or conform to required academic standard.	Sources of information are not consistently documented. If they are, format is inconsistent or does not conform to required academic standard.	Source materials are used without documentation.

Bibliography

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