



London School  
of Theology

# MA in Biblical Studies

## Module Syllabus

## **MA7101**

**Module Title: Hermeneutics**

**40 credits**

### **Syllabus:**

This core module provides the theoretical foundation on which the optional modules will explore specific aspects of the contemporary interpretation of the Bible.

It sets out from the premise that biblical interpretation today is a complex and contested activity for a number of reasons: the notion of sacred text is problematic in a cultural environment that is at once secular, rationalist, post-rationalist and pluralist; much biblical interpretation, at all levels, is driven by hermeneutically unreflective theological interests; and powerful intellectual movements seek to co-opt or disqualify the Bible as an authoritative text.

In part one hermeneutics is introduced as a general field of enquiry, to be explained both as the product of its historical development and as a philosophical investigation of the conditions for the interpretation of texts. Account is taken of the fact that for many students this will be a challenging area of study, not only because the language and concepts are unfamiliar but also because it may run counter to deeply held convictions about the nature of biblical meaning.

Part two explores questions related to the basic processes of interpretation in accordance with the conventional differentiation between author, text and reader. What questions are raised by the fact that the Bible is in the first place a collection of ancient texts? What are the internal aspects of the Bible (language, genre, intertextuality, canon) that have a bearing on interpretation? How are we to assess the role of the reader or of reading communities in the production of meaning?

Part three then asks about the practice of biblical interpretation in relation to two broad contemporary contexts. First, the relation between biblical

interpretation and theological synthesis is examined, with particular attention given to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture as a hermeneutical method. Secondly, the hermeneutical challenges entailed in the task of reading the Bible as a public text, in tension with a range of social and political concerns (Marxism, feminism, identity politics, post-colonialism, environmentalism, etc.), will be explored.

## MA7103

**Module Title: Old Testament Theology in Context**

**Pathway A 20 credits; Pathway B 20 credits**

### **Syllabus:**

#### **PART A: Reading the Word and the World (20 credits)**

Unit **1**: Story and its Interpretation: *megillat* Ruth.

Unit **2**: Stories Interlinked: Gen 1, 2–3, 6–9 and Mesopotamian texts.

Unit **3**: Stories read Alongside: the dynamics of Gen 22 and Jdg 11.

Unit **4**: Reading Paradigm, Icon, Vision and Symbol.

Elective §a. Adam emerging: Eden and paleoanthropology.

Elective §b. Zion and Zionism: eschatology and politics.

Elective §c. Imagery of Sun and Light: association clusters.

Unit **5**: Reading and Responding to the Natural World

Elective §a. Use and Abuse of the Old Testament in Ecotheology.

Elective §b. Nature in the Poetry of Praise: Old Testament and contemporary.

Elective §c. Landscape as Symbol: emotional dynamics and epiphany.

• **Reflection:** Value added and recontextualisation.

Tutor~Candidate discussion on Zoom.

• **Essay choice:** 4,000 words in Formative & Summative delivery.

**PART B: PERSONHOOD, MORTALITY and LIFE** (20 credits)

Unit **1**: Personhood in Perpetuity? body, mind and spirit.

Unit **2**: The Meaning of Mortality: *Gilgamesh*, *Qohelet* and beyond.

Unit **3**: Lamenting/Dispensing the Shadow of Death.

Unit **4**: Mothers, Lovers and Others: symbols of life, or misfits?

Unit **5**: Patriarchy and Resistance: Feminist, Womanist, Empowerment perspectives.

- **Reflection**: Value added and recontextualisation.

Tutor~Candidate Discussion on Zoom

- **Essay choice**: 4,000 words in Formative & Summative delivery.

Students may choose to take either Pathway (A or B) to complete 20 credits for this module.

If students wish to do so, they may decide to study both Pathways, in which case the student will complete 40 credits in this module.

## **MA7203**

**Module Title:      Race and the Bible**

**20 credits**

### **Syllabus:**

In 1969, James H. Cone, a graduate of Philander Smith College, Arkansas, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and Northwestern University published *Black Theology and Black Power*, Minneapolis: Seabury Press. In this influential book, Cone argued for a distinctive black theology on the basis that theology is always attached to specific historical contexts. Over the last 50 years since publication, there has been an explosion of 'black theologies' which critique the white church and concomitant with that, there has been an explosion of 'theologies' from a diversity of ethnicities.

This module seeks to engage with those theologies recognising their legitimacy and importance for the contemporary church, wherever located. Beginning with an examination of the difficult biblical texts that have been read, historically, with an oppressive lens from the white, western church and critiquing the presuppositions and legitimacy of that hermeneutical approach, the module will seek to foster a hermeneutically responsible reading of those texts. Additionally, the module will examine the responses made by theologians of diverse ethnicities, evaluating the reading of texts for their hermeneutical legitimacy.

Having examined the biblical texts against a diverse range of readings, the module will consider the various movements that have arisen against the oppression experienced both within and outside the church and examine the presuppositions and hermeneutical approaches to the various biblical texts of those movements.

## **MA7104**

**Module Title:       The Theology of Romans: A Case Study in Hermeneutics**

**20 credits**

### **Syllabus:**

Two questions that lie at the heart of the work of New Testament interpretation are “What is the genre of the text” and “What is the context of the text?” This module examines the intersection of these two questions by considering Paul’s letter to the Romans:

- 1) as an outstanding example of the apostolic letter genre
- 2) in the context of the early Jewish-Christian movement among the Gentiles.

The objective is not to provide a commentary on or reading of the text but to expose some of the key literary, historical and theological assumptions that bias interpretation in one direction or another. Romans has been chosen because of its obvious canonical prominence, but more importantly because it illustrates, probably better than any other New Testament text, how history and theology interact within both of Gadamer’s hermeneutical horizons—that of Paul and that of the modern interpreter.

The genre of the text is considered both as a matter of literary form and, in more pragmatic terms, as an expression of apostolic purpose. This requires us to give some weight, in the first place, to Paul’s statement of his ambition at the beginning and end of the letter: to bring about an obedience of faith among the Gentiles in advance of the rule of Christ over them (Rom. 1:1-5; 15:12-15). This focus allows us, on the one hand, to manage the scope and complexity of the letter, and on the other, to engage with the “apocalyptic” dimension of a text that challenges the dominance of Greek-Roman paganism.

The question of context comes down to whether we think of Romans as a document emerging out of a Jewish worldview or as one that anticipates later theological developments, such as Patristic debate over the two natures of Christ or Reformed debate over Law and Grace. In this respect, the module provides an opportunity to reflect further on the tension between historical criticism and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture. The module will look at the relation of Romans to Jewish thought in the late second temple period and its stance *vis-à-vis* Greek religion and Roman political power. But it will also encourage reflection on how theological relevance may in turn be recovered once justice has been done to the historical situatedness of the text.



**MA7204**

**Module Title: Women and the Bible**

**20 credits**

**Syllabus:**

This module has arisen from the recognition that, historically, the voices of women in the Bible and the experiences of those women have been silenced within much biblical interpretation, church history and the contemporary world. The Bible has many stories in which women are the prime human actors and yet much of the historical-critical and hermeneutical methods within Church history has not allowed these to be heard.

Beginning with a consideration of stories of women in the OT and then into the NT, the module considers these within their culture-specific contexts and so foregrounds the experience of women within the biblical story. Some experiences to be covered might include biblical women at work considering the roles and positions held in society to biblical women at various stages of life. Additionally, consideration may be given to foreign women and their interactions with God's people (e.g. Hagar, Rahab & Ruth)

Having set the context, the student will consider the interpretive issues that led, historically, to these texts being silenced and the reaction to this in the last half or the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the voices of these biblical women and the impact of the scholarship of women have been increasingly foregrounded. Furthermore, the syllabus will introduce the student to the scholarship of women from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds recognising that hermeneutical studies of these texts has not just been confined to those from a western, white background.

**MA7202**

**Module Title: The Bible and the Environment**

**20 credits**

**Syllabus:**

Scarcely a day goes past without a news item regarding the environmental challenges faced by the world from unprecedented floods in Pakistan, heatwaves in Europe during summer 2022, the diminishing of both plant and animal species, rising sea levels and the retreating polar ice caps to name just a few. Direct action in the UK from groups such as Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil and groups such as these in other parts of the world have given voice to the concern that many have over the environmental challenges being faced by the world.

This module gives an opportunity to consider the topic of the environment or 'creation care' from a biblical perspective considering the hermeneutical legitimacy of the readings of texts such as Genesis 1:28-29 within the Christian tradition. In a 1967 paper by Lynn White, he argued that the roots of the environmental crisis lie not just in human technological achievements but also in the Western worldview which is underpinned by the Judeo-Christian tradition. This Western worldview, he argued gave precedence to humans over nature. The module will evaluate the legitimacy of that claim and those who have followed in his footsteps. However, the biblical story is not simply one of creation but of an eschatological trajectory from creation to new creation and during the module, the student will examine this trajectory as to whether that offers anything as a way of a Christian response to the environment and issues raised by its care.

Finally, given the centrality of this topic in recent years, there has been a plethora of theological responses to this topic and a selection of these will be investigated and analysed for their hermeneutical and theological legitimacy.

## **MA7400**

**Module Title:      Dissertation Preparation**

**20 credits**

### **Syllabus:**

Students will engage with elements of academic research and writing, such as discovering a topic, developing a research question, a hypothesis and a thesis. The module explores various research methods with an emphasis on qualitative research but with some attention to quantitative research. The importance of recognising and accounting for one's own assumption and social location in theological research and writing will be addressed. Furthermore, students will develop knowledge and skills for selecting appropriate literature and employing the proper conventions of academic writing. The module will enable students to conceive and design a research proposal.

## **MA7401**

**Module Title:      Dissertation**

**60 credits**

### **Syllabus:**

Restricted only by the confines of the overall subject of biblical interpretation, the student identifies for themselves the particular topic they wish to study for this module. After initial approval of this topic has been granted by the module leader, a suitable supervisor is identified and assigned. Student and supervisor then collaborate closely at all stages of the study to ensure that appropriate and relevant reading (electronic or printed) has been incorporated and taken into consideration. This includes the necessity for a diversity of gender and ethnicities to be included within that reading. An indicative Bibliography will be presented as part of the dissertation proposal.