NT 4023: African American New Testament Hermeneutics
3 Credits

Course Description: This course will briefly introduce important works of and about New Testament interpretation by African American New Testament scholars. Works to be read and discussed pertain especially to the following topics: the African American encounter with the Bible; Africa and African Imagery in the Old Testament, New Testament and Early Christian Literature; the New Testament and the American debate over slavery; and interpretation of the Gospels, the Pauline epistles, and the book of Revelation by African Americans. Throughout the course, attention will be given to the particular concerns and perspectives of womanist biblical interpreters.

Meeting dates: January 3, 5, 9, 10, 12, 17, 19, 23, 24

Intended Major Learning Outcomes:
Upon completion of the course, each student will be able to:
1. Describe how key historical events and circumstances have contributed to diverse uses and understandings of the Bible in the African American church in the past and today;
2. Offer informed comment on how ancient beliefs about race and ethnic difference may have functioned in the New Testament and other early Christian literature;
3. Analyze various exegetical approaches used by African American New Testament scholars (including womanist scholars), situate these methods within the work of the guild of biblical studies, and assess the methods’ benefits and limitations;
4. Recognize and describe the distinctive hermeneutical opportunities and problems that arise when persons concerned to discern and combat racism interpret the Gospels, Pauline texts and the book of Revelation;

Textbooks: All textbooks are on reserve in the library; articles not found in assigned textbooks are also available on the CAMS site or on reserve. Several of the textbooks are available in the LPTS Seminary Bookstore.

Required:
Recommended:


Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and informed participation (worth @20% of the final grade).
2. Each student is expected to bring a one page single-spaced summary of the discussion topic to class beginning on January 5. The summaries should address the following: summary of assigned readings, identification of at least two or three historical, theological, or socio-cultural issues, brief reflection on the topic as it relates to biblical interpretation, and at least one question. I will check to see if each student brings their summary to class when I check attendance (worth 30%). The eight summaries should be submitted via email by 2:00 p.m. on January 26. *Late submissions will be penalized.*
3. An half-hour in class group presentation analyzing a major issue in African American Hermeneutics that intersects with the broader field of biblical, theological and philosophical hermeneutics (worth 30%). Each group can choose the following topics:
   a. Biblical interpretation in the African American Churches/Preaching
   b. Race and Racism in Biblical Interpretation
   c. Interpreting Problematic or Difficult Texts
   d. Feminist and Womanist Interpretation
   e. The Bible in Liberation, Native American and or Black Theology
   f. The Authority of Scripture and Contextual Interpretation: Problems and Possibilities
4. A short (5 pp.) paper on the work of a current African American New Testament scholar or students can write a paper on their group presentation topic (worth 20%; to be submitted electronically by 2:00 p.m. on January 30). *Late submissions will be penalized.*

Course Schedule:

**January 3: Introduction to Hermeneutics and African American Hermeneutics**

- William H. Myers, “The Hermeneutical Dilemma of the African American Biblical Student,” in *Stony the Road*, 40-56
- Thomas Hoyt, “Interpreting Biblical Scholarship for the Black Church Tradition,” in *Stony the Road*, 17-39
- Renita J. Weems, “Reading Her Way through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible,” in *Stony the Road*, 57-77

**January 5: Historical Survey of African American Encounter with the Bible**

- Vincent L. Wimbush, “The Bible and African Americans: An Outline of an Interpretive History,” in *Stony the Road*, 81-97 and *The Bible and African Americans*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 76-85. (On CAMS)


Recommended but not required


Recommended but not required


January 12: Ancient slavery, and the role of the Bible in the American debate over slavery

Note: In addition to reading the secondary literature, spend some time looking at references to “slave” and “slaves” in the New Testament (use a concordance, or Bibleworks or similar software). Make a note of passages that seem especially noteworthy or problematic to you. Also, when you are reading the secondary literature, write down the citations of passages that played important roles in the slavery/anti-slavery debate.


January 17: Jesus and the Gospels in African American Interpretation

- Blount, True to Our Native Land, pick two full entries for Matthew, Mark, Luke or John
- Allen Dwight Callahan, The Talking Book, 185-239
January 19: Paul and Pauline Letters in African American Interpretation

January 23: The Book of Revelation in African American Interpretation
- Brian Blount, *True to Our Native Land*, Revelation, 523-58
- Class presentations, Group 1, 2, 3

Recommended but not required
- Brian Blount, *Can I Get a Witness: Reading Revelation through African American Culture*, 69-117

January 24: Theological Questions about Contextual or Cultural Interpretation
- Class Presentations, Groups 4, 5, 6
Course Policies

Policy on Inclusive Language:
In speech and in written assignments, please avoid divisive terms that reinforce stereotypes or are pejorative. Do not use language that leaves out part of the population, perpetuates stereotyping, or diminishes importance. Do not use male pronouns (such as “men”) to refer to a group that includes females as well. Consult the Academic Support Center for additional guidance if necessary.

Policy on Plagiarism:
Prohibition of plagiarism will be strictly enforced. Ideas and words (even short phrases, if distinctive) drawn from print, Internet, or other sources should be fully documented. (For journals entries on a given assigned work, page numbers should be included in parentheses.) Any student work in which plagiarism is discovered will receive an automatic F with no possibility of redoing the assignment. Use great care!!!

Policy on Use of Electronic Devices in Class
All cell phones should be turned off during class unless waiting for an important call, in which case you should let the professor know ahead of time. When using computers in class do not access the Internet unless specifically for purposes relevant to the course. Checking of email or Facebook will be grounds for dismissal from the session and will adversely affect one’s class participation grade.