

SM 3003 • Fall 2021
“How Should We Read the Bible?
Learning from the Debate over Slavery”
A “Big Question” course

Meeting via Zoom on Thursdays, 6:00pm-8:50pm

Instructor: Dr. Susan R. Garrett

Office: 303 Schlegel

Phone: 502-639-2248; Email: sgarrett@lpts.edu

Overview:

This interdisciplinary course will address the big question, “How should we read the Bible?” To gain traction on this question, we will examine ways the Bible was used in the debate over slavery in the United States, in the period from America’s colonial origins through the Civil War. By means of historical and exegetical investigation, we will gain insight into how biblical interpretation both shapes and is shaped by a range of other factors, including social location, assumptions about racial difference, economic interests, attitudes toward authority and hierarchy, understandings of divine agency, and beliefs about “common sense.” Throughout the course, we will aim to draw connections between arguments made by Christians during the historical debate over slavery and the use of the Bible in cultural controversies today.

Students should be aware that, given the nature of the topic, we will be reading primary sources from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries that may (in some cases) seem offensive by today’s standards. Analyzing and critiquing the biblical hermeneutics in these primary sources will open the way to understanding how the debate over slavery generated and perpetuated interpretive patterns still evident in popular use of the Bible today.

Intended Major Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, you will be able to:

1. Discern and analyze strategies for biblical interpretation and ethical application used by Christian preachers and authors (including yourself) [MDiv SLO 1 and MAR SLO 1];
2. Reflect critically on competing paradigms for the authority of the Bible and its relationship to other sources of authority (such as tradition, secular knowledge, and experience), and on the past and present social impact of this diversity of views [MDiv SLO 1 and MAR SLO 1];
and
3. Describe and offer informed comment on the history of slavery, racism, and the antislavery movement in the United States from the colonial period through the Civil War; and trace

lines of continuity to current patterns of thought and action. [MDiv SLO 2, MAR SLO 2, and Antiracism SLO]

Textbooks:

1. Butler, Anthea. *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. ISBN: 1469661179. List \$21.60.
2. Noll, Mark A. *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. Available as an ebook from our library: link [here](#).
3. Stewart, James Brewer. *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*. Revised edition. New York: Hill and Wang, 1997. ISBN: 080901596X. List \$15.10.

Other resources will be made available online (links provided) or through Canvas.

Format of the Course:

The course will have a seminar format, meeting once per week. You should come to class well prepared to discuss the assigned readings for that session. Additionally, you will make a presentation to the class; prepare a final project showing how historical or other circumstances shaped the biblical interpretation found in a cultural artifact of your choice; and write a short (3-page) reflection paper explaining how the course has affected your views on the question for this course, "How should we read the Bible?"

By default, this will be a graded course (A = 93 and above; A- = 90-92; B+ = 87-89; B = 83-86; B- = 80-82; C+ = 77-79; C = 73-76; C- = 70-72; D+ = 67-69; D = 63-66; D- = 60-62; F = 59 and below). The course may be taken P/F, but note that all assignments must still be completed; each assignment not completed at a passing level will result in an additional 20% penalty against the final grade.

Course requirements:

1. **Attendance and Participation.** Attendance/timeliness. Perfect attendance is expected; if you are absent, you will be expected to complete a make-up assignment. Any unexcused absences or repeated tardiness will result in a grade penalty. If you have a valid reason for missing or being late to class, please consult with the professor. More than three absences (= 25% of the course) will result in a failing grade. Participation and engagement. Before each class session you are to read the assigned readings and do any other preparations as indicated in the syllabus, so that you are well prepared to participate in the conversation. For some sessions, you will be tasked with being especially well prepared to discuss a particular reading assignment. **Counts for 30% of the final grade.**
2. **Presentation on a proslavery or antislavery activist.** You will lead the conversation about a pro- or antislavery activist covered in the syllabus (beginning with the session on Sept. 23). Your total presentation (with class discussion) may last up to 45 minutes. You

will need to prepare a handout or slide show to facilitate discussion. Sign-up for sessions will take place on the first day of class. **Counts for 15% of the final grade. A grading rubric will be provided.**

3. **Essay on the question “How should we read the Bible?”** Write a reflection paper that is at least 3 pages (double-spaced) in length, describing your most important takeaways from the course pertaining to how people do/should read the Bible. The essay is due at 5:00 p.m. on Friday, December 10, 2021. **Counts for 15% of the final grade. A grading rubric will be provided.**
4. **Final project.** In consultation with the professor, you will prepare a final project in which you analyze a cultural artifact or entity with respect to its historical context and its explicit or implicit biblical hermeneutics. Ordinarily this project will be a research paper of 8-10 pages, not counting notes and bibliography. (Other types of projects may be negotiated.) The cultural artifact or entity you choose to analyze may be from the era of the slavery debate, or it may be from the more recent past. The artifact could be a book, a sermon or set of sermons, a play or movie, a movement, a museum, or something else. It need not be related specifically to the slavery debate, provided you can effectively contextualize its biblical hermeneutic. The project is due at 5:00 p.m. on Friday, December 17, 2021. **Counts for 40% of the final grade. A grading rubric will be provided.**

Summary of requirements and contribution to final grade:

Attendance/timeliness and informed participation:	30%
Presentation on an activist:	15%
Essay on how to read the Bible:	15%
Final project:	40%
TOTAL	100%

Schedule, Readings, and Topics:

NOTE: Some of the listed readings are from textbooks that you are required to buy for class. Other assignments include hyperlinks to sources on the Web. Other links are to items found on the course site (if a link doesn't work, click "Files" on the menu, then "Course Reading Assignments" to see whether it is there; readings in the folder are organized by date and author's last name). There are several assignments that will need to be added at a later date.

1. **Thursday, September 9 – Orientation to the course ([Link to agenda](#))**
 - a. Preparation:
 - i. Review the syllabus carefully
 - ii. Read:
 1. Emerson Powery, [“The Bible and Slavery in American Life,”](#) in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in America*, edited by Paul C.

Gutjahr (Oxford University Press, 2017), 304-18.

2. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, Introduction
3. Abolition timeline (available [here](#)).

b. Topics for discussion:

- i. Review of the format and goals of the course
- ii. Orientation to the topic: Why Study the Slavery Debate?
- iii. A framework for analyzing biblical interpretation and cultural conflict

2. Thursday, September 16 – The Puritans and Slavery

a. For preparation, read the following:

- i. Samuel Sewall, *The Selling of Joseph* (available [here](#); *take notes on scriptural arguments*)
- ii. John Saffin, “A Brief and Candid Answer to a late Printed Sheet, *Entitled, The Selling of Joseph*” (available [here](#); *take notes on scriptural arguments*)
- iii. *Recommended*: Cotton Mather, *The Negro Christianized* (available [here](#)).
- iv. Susan Garrett, Manuscript on the origins of slavery in New England (available [here](#)).
- v. Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (2nd edition; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), [chap. 2](#) and the [sections in chap. 3 entitled “Native Americans” and “Slaves.”](#)

b. Topics for discussion:

- i. The enslaving of indigenous people
- ii. How the “triangle trade” drove enslavement, and the overlooked role of the West Indies in early New England history
- iii. Servants within the ecology of the puritan family
- iv. Samuel Sewall vs. John Saffin.

3. Thursday, September 23 - The Quakers and Slavery

a. For preparation, read the following:

- i. “1688 Petition against Slavery” (available [here](#) [note link to transcript of petition at the bottom of the page]; *take notes on scriptural arguments*).
- ii. John Woolman, *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* (available [here](#); *take notes on scriptural arguments*)
- iii. Noll, *History of Christianity*, chap. 3, section on “Quakers and Pennsylvania.”
- iv. Elizabeth Cazden, [“Quakers, Slavery, Anti-slavery, and Race,”](#) in *Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, edited by Stephen Angell and Pink Dandelion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 347-62.
- v. Marcus Rediker, “The ‘Quaker Comet’ Was the Greatest Abolitionist You’ve Never Heard of” (available [here](#))

- b. Topics for discussion:
 - i. The Germantown Protest: The importance of the Golden Rule
 - ii. The gradual victory of the abolitionist view among Quakers
 - iii. John Woolman’s interpretive strategies for protesting slavery

4. Thursday, September 30 – The Revolutionary Era

- a. For preparation, read the following:
 - i. Hopkins, “A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans” (available [here](#); *take notes on scriptural arguments*).
 - ii. John Wesley, “Thoughts upon Slavery” (available [here](#); *take notes on scriptural arguments*).
 - iii. Daniel Coker, “A Dialogue Between a Virginian and an African Minister,” in *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African American Protest Literature, 1790-1860*, edited by Richard Newman et al. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 52-65; *take notes on scriptural arguments*
 - iv. Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 3-33.
 - v. “American Colonization Society” (available [here](#)).
- b. Topics for discussion:
 - i. “Liberty” in revolutionary rhetoric and its impact on calls for emancipation
 - ii. Early Methodism and abolitionism
 - iii. The church and the colonization movement

5. Thursday, October 7 – Prophetic Denunciations of Slavery

- a. For preparation, read or watch the following:
 - i. David Walker, *Appeal, In Four Articles: Together With A Preamble To The Coloured Citizens Of The World, But In Particular, And Very Expressly, To Those Of The United States Of America* (available [here](#); read the “Description” and then click “Download” [*take notes on scriptural arguments*]; a brief introduction to Walker’s *Appeal*, by David Blight, is available [here](#)).
 - ii. On Maria W. Stewart, read chaps. 1-2 of Valerie C. Cooper, *Word, like Fire: Maria Stewart, the Bible, and the Rights of African Americans*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011) (available [here](#) through our library; have your remote access credentials ready). Includes the text (with annotations) of Stewart’s essay “Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality” (*take notes on scriptural arguments*)
 - iii. Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 35-50.
 - iv. “The Cotton Economy and Slavery.” This 3-minute video, which is narrated by Henry Louis Gates and which is available [here](#), is an excerpt from a PBS documentary entitled *Many Rivers to Cross*.
 - v. David Howard-Pitney, “The Enduring Black Jeremiad: The American Jeremiad and Black Protest Rhetoric, from Frederick Douglass to W. E. B. Du Bois, 1841-1919,” in [American Quarterly 38, no. 3 \(1986\): 481–92](#).

- b. Topics for discussion:
 - i. David Walker and the black jeremiad
 - ii. Maria Stewart as social critic and advocate of black “moral uplift”

6. Thursday, October 14 – Immediatism

- a. For preparation, read the following:
 - i. John Rankin, “Letter on American Slavery” (available [here](#); *take notes on scriptural arguments*).
 - ii. John G. Fee, *An Anti-Slavery Manual, or, The Wrongs of American Slavery Exposed By the Light of the Bible and of Facts, with A Remedy for the Evil* (available [here](#) [click on Table of Contents]; *take notes on scriptural arguments*).
 - iii. Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 51-96.
 - iv. Emerson Powery, “The Bible and Slavery in American Life” (previously assigned for September 9; review the section “The Abolitionist Use of the Bible: Immediate Emancipationists”).
 - v. Richard S. Newman, *Abolition: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), chap. 3.
 - vi. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, chaps. 2-3
 - vii. “John Rankin (Abolitionist)” (available [here](#)).
- b. Topics for discussion:
 - i. The rise of immediatism and the backlash against it
 - ii. Well-intentioned but faulty exegetical attacks on slavery
 - iii. Why immediatism was thought to undermine the authority of Scripture

Thursday, October 21 – RESEARCH & STUDY WEEK

7. Thursday, October 28 – Frederick Douglass

- a. For preparation, read the following:
 - i. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845). Spend at least one hour skimming the body of the book, and in addition, read the Appendix in full (book available [here](#); *take notes on scriptural arguments*).
 - ii. Frederick Douglass, “American Religion, and the Free Church of Scotland” (speech given in 1846; available [here](#)).
 - iii. Sterling Stuckey, “‘My Burden Lightened’: Frederick Douglass, the Bible, and Slave Culture,” in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush and Rosamond C. Rodman (New York: Continuum, 2000), 251-265.
 - iv. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, chap. 4.

- b. Topics for Discussion
 - i. Overview of the life and impact of Frederick Douglass
 - ii. Douglass's scriptural hermeneutic

8. Thursday, November 4 – Proslavery Exegesis

- a. For preparation, read the following:
 - i. A. T. Holmes, "The Duties of Christian Masters" available [here](#); *take notes on scriptural arguments*).
 - ii. James H. Thornwell, "The Rights and Duties of Masters" (available [here](#); *take notes on scriptural arguments*).
 - iii. DeBow's Review: "Slavery and the Bible" (available [here](#); *take notes on scriptural arguments*).
 - iv. Thornton Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument: Or, Slavery in the Light of Divine Revelation," in Paul Finkelman, *Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 259-72 (*take notes on scriptural arguments*).
 - v. Emerson Powery, "The Bible and Slavery in American Life" (previously assigned for September 9; review the section "Pro-Slavery Use of the Bible").
 - vi. J. Albert Harrill, "[The Use of the New Testament in the American Slave Controversy: A Case History in the Hermeneutical Tension between Biblical Criticism and Christian Moral Debate](#)," in *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 10, no. 2 (2000): 149–86.
 - vii. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, chap. 5.
 - viii. Felicia R. Lee, "From Noah's Curse to Slavery's Rationale" (available [here](#)).

- b. Topics for Discussion
 - i. Categorizing the types of proslavery exegetical arguments
 - ii. The ideology of the family and of honor undergirding proslavery exegesis
 - iii. What continuity is there from the hermeneutical assumptions of these proslavery arguments to ones employed today?

9. Thursday, November 11 – Christian Moderates

- a. For preparation, read the following:
 - i. Charles Hodge, "Slavery" (available [here](#); using the scroll bar at the bottom, scroll to the beginning of the article, on p. 473; *take notes on all scriptural arguments*).
 - ii. Emerson Powery, "The Bible and Slavery in American Life" (previously assigned for September 9; review the section "The Abolitionist Use of the Bible: Gradual Emancipationists").
 - iii. Mark A. Noll, "[The Bible and Slavery](#)," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, edited by Randall M. Miller et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 43-73.
 - iv. Molly Oshatz, [Slavery and Sin: The Fight against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism](#) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 43-60,

75-80.

- v. Wallace, Peter J. [“The Defense of the Forgotten Center: Charles Hodge and the Enigma of Emancipationism in Antebellum America,”](#) in *Journal of Presbyterian History* 75:3 (1997): 165–77.
- vi. Paul C. Gutjahr, [Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 168-75.
- vii. *Recommended*: Timothy Isaiah Cho, “Slavery, Racial Hierarchy, Charles Hodge, and Old School Presbyterianism” (available [here](#)).

b. Topics for Discussion

- i. Four standard solutions to slavery as an exegetical problem
- ii. Charles Hodge as Defender of the Center

10. Thursday, November 18 – The Outsized Influence of the Beecher Family

a. For preparation, read the following:

- i. Chapter 9 of Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe (available [here](#); *take notes on all scriptural arguments*).
- ii. Henry Ward Beecher, “Peace, Be Still,” in *Fast Day Sermons: or The Pulpit on the State of the Country* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1861), 265-92; *take notes on all scriptural arguments*.
- iii. Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 151-80.
- iv. “Lyman Beecher” (available [here](#); read specifically the section on the Lane Debates)
- v. David S. Reynolds, [Mightier than the Sword: Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Battle for America](#) (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), chap. 1.

b. Topics for discussion:

- i. Harriet Beecher Stowe as biblical interpreter
- ii. The legacy (for good and for ill) of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
- iii. Henry Ward Beecher as a harbinger of liberal Christianity

Thursday, November 25 – HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

11. Thursday, December 2 – John Brown and Abraham Lincoln

a. For preparation, read the following:

- i. “John Brown” (available [here](#); *take notes on all scriptural arguments*).
- ii. John Brown’s Address to the Court (available [here](#); *take notes on all scriptural arguments*).
- iii. Selected letters of John Brown (details TBD; available [here](#); *take notes on all scriptural arguments*).
- iv. Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address (available [here](#); *take notes on all scriptural arguments*).
- v. Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 151-80.
- vi. Selections (TBD) from Louis A. DeCaro, *“Fire from the Midst of You”: A Religious Life of John Brown* (New York: NYU Press, 2002).

- vii. Noll, *History of Christianity*, chapter 11, section on Abraham Lincoln.
 - viii. Matthew Holbreich and Danilo Petranovich, "[In the Valley of the Dry Bones: Lincoln's Biblical Oratory and the Coming of the Civil War,](#)" in *History of Political Thought* 35:1 (2014): 121-46.
 - ix. Dave Davies, "John Brown and Abraham Lincoln: Divergent Paths In The Fight To End Slavery" (available [here](#)).
- b. Topics for discussion:
- i. How John Brown read the Bible, and why
 - ii. John Brown as polarizing figure
 - iii. Reading Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address in context

12. Thursday, December 9 – The Heritage of the Slavery Debates

- a. For preparation, read the following:
- i. Butler, *White Evangelical Racism*.
 - ii. Interview with Kristin Kobes du Mez, author of *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a nation* (available [here](#); recommended [2nd] interview [here](#)).
 - iii. Ellie Krasne, "How Leftists' Critical Race Theory Poisons Our Discussion of Racism" (available [here](#)).
- b. Topics for discussion:
- i. Connections among pre-Civil War exegesis, some forms of evangelical Christianity, and white supremacy today
 - ii. How has the semester's study changed the way you read the Bible? How has it changed the way you view others' reading of the Bible?
 - iii. What are the most important points in your own answer to the question "How should we read the Bible?"

Appendix: Course Policies

Use of Inclusive Language

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. More discussion about inclusive language can be accessed from the Academic Support Center and from the section of the LPTS web site on "Inclusive and Expansive Language" (see [here](#)).

Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the professor is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others (including other students as well as online sources) must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Failure to credit sources (whether intentional or due to oversight) constitutes plagiarism and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For more information, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

Special Accommodations

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with one of the instructors as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with one of the instructors.

Citation Policy

Citations in your papers should follow Seminary standards, which are based on these guides:

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010.

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 9th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

The Chicago Manual of Style. 17th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center. See also the library's citation help center: <https://lpts.libguides.com/digitalresources/citingsources>.

Attendance Policy

Perfect attendance is expected; if you are absent, you will be expected to complete a make-up assignment. Any unexcused absences or repeated tardiness will result in a grade penalty. If you have a valid reason for missing or being late to class, please consult with the professor. More than three absences (= 25% of the course) will result in a failing grade.

Etiquette for Digital Meetings

Timeliness: Plan to sign on to the meeting at least a couple of minutes before the scheduled start-time. Audio: Please mute your microphone unless you are speaking or about to speak. If the discussion gets lively, virtually raise your hand and be recognized by the moderator before speaking or use the "chat" function. On-screen presence: • **Keep your camera turned on**, unless you must step away for a moment. • Close the door, turn off your phone, Twitter alerts, etc. Do

not multitask. • If you use a virtual background, test it first to make sure it is not distracting. • Do not eat, walk around, or move in other distracting ways. (Sipping a beverage is fine.)

Policy on Late Papers and Exams, and on Incompletes

Students are expected to adhere to the stated schedule, with specified deadlines. For assignments where you are making a presentation to the class, penalties will be applied for lateness, as per the appropriate rubric. Regarding the final reflection paper and research paper: If for good reasons you are not going to be able to turn an assignment in by the deadline, you must confer with the instructor ahead of time. Extensions may be granted, but ordinarily you would need to ask for it at least 24 hours in advance.