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HB6/710 (3)
Timeless Inquiries: Biblical Wisdom Literature and Contemporary Values
Fall 2016

PURPOSE: Biblical wisdom literature engages with a surprisingly modern set of concerns, including creation, ecology, feminine faces of God, sexuality, money, and responsibility. By learning and applying a variety of text-centered and reader-centered interpretive techniques, we will explore the lessons and questions of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Ben Sirach.

PREREQUISITES: HB500, Introduction to Hebrew Bible

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:

Students will be expected to learn and demonstrate the ability to

- Summarize the content and describe the style of five works of wisdom literature
- Explain and apply a variety of Biblical interpretive techniques
- Use Biblical works of wisdom literature as resources to address selected contemporary issues

FORMAT AND CONTENT: This 3-credit semester-long course meets once a week for three-hours, Thursday afternoons 2:00-5:00 pm, throughout fall term (September 12-December 3, 2016). Course activities include lecture, discussion, student presentations, and small group activities.

TEXTS: Please purchase through Amazon.ca or Chapters.ca:

- Berlin, Adele. *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2004.

Please note: This edition provides us with a uniform translation, extensive annotations, and includes scholarly essays, some of which will be assigned reading.

RESERVES: Please access through the course moodle the following essays and chapters (bibliographic details in course bibliography):

- Adler, "Two Subjects, One Love" in *Engendering Judaism*, 133-139
- Baeck, "Job and Kohelet," Buber, "A God Who Hides His Face," and Kaufmann, "Job the Righteous Man and Job the Sage" in Glatzer, ed., 51-70

- *Ben Sirach*, excerpts: On wisdom: 1:1-10, 4:11-19; 6:18-37; 14:20-15:10; 24:1-33; 38:24-39:11; On social justice: 4:1-10; 34:21-27; 35:14-26; On speech: 5:9-15; 18:15-29; 19:4-17; 20:1-31; 23:7-15; 27:4-7; 27:11-15; 28:8-26.
- Duhan Kaplan, "Job and A Serious Man: Trials of a Generation"
- Kugel, "Wisdom and the Anthological Temper," in Stern, *The Anthology in Jewish Literature*, 32-52
- McFague, "How Shall We Live? Christianity and Planetary Economics," *A New Climate for Theology*, 81-97
- Mitchell, "Introduction," *The Book of Job*, vii-xxxii
- Shapiro, *The Way of Solomon*, 95-102, 110-112.
- Radford Reuther, "Mary and Wisdom in Protestant Mystical Millennialism," *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 220-248

Please access through the course moodle the following blog posts at sophiastreet.com:

- Re-Discovering Cynicism
- I, Kohelet
- Ecclesiastes: What's It All About
- Interpreting Kohelet
- Listen to Your Mother
- Impossible Love
- Love, Sex, and Assault in the Song of Songs

COURSE POLICIES

1. **Attendance:** For a weekly course, VST requires at least 80% attendance. For an intensive course, VST requires 100% attendance.
2. **Reading and assignments:** Students are expected to read all required assignments before class and to complete all assignments as outlined in the syllabus within the specified dates of the course and term.
3. **Academic honesty:** Students are expected to adhere to VST's requirements for academic honesty as published in the Student Handbook.
4. **Inclusive language:** In speaking and writing, inclusive language is expected when making reference to humans and a variety of metaphors are anticipated when making reference to God.
5. **Assignment and Course Evaluation:**
 - Course evaluations at VST combine a letter grade system (A+ to B-; course failure is "Not Approved") including narrative comments based on the competencies of the course. No number grades or weights of assignments are calculated, nor are final grades given numerical equivalents.
 - Individual assignments within a course are given narrative evaluations, that is, APP (Approved) or INC (Incomplete) with narrative comments, based on the competencies and expectations set for that assignment. One re-write is allowed on any assignment that is INC. The re-written assignment is due two weeks after the work is returned. The final evaluation for an assignment can be APP or NAPP after a re-write.
 - For a passing grade in the course, all assignments must be Approved.

6. Late assignments

Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment. Repeated failure to submit assignments on time may affect the final grade for the course.

7. Limitation on use of social media

Ordinarily, the use of electronic devices in the contexts of classrooms or meetings will be to support the learning, formation, or agenda at hand

8. VST is committed to creating safe space and an inclusive learning environment. If you have a diagnosed or suspected learning disability, chronic condition, mental health concern, or physical requirement which you anticipate may impact your participation in this class, you are encouraged to discuss your needs with the instructor and the Dean within the first week of classes.

CALENDAR

Sept 15

Introduction to Wisdom Literature

Read: Psalms 19, 49, 112 in *Jewish Study Bible*

Read: Berlin & Brettler, "Modern Study of the Bible" in *Jewish Study Bible*, 2084-2096

Sept 22

Ecclesiastes; Meaning, Happiness

Read: *Ecclesiastes*, in *Jewish Study Bible*

Read: Duhan Kaplan, "Re-discovering Cynicism" (moodle/sophiastreet.com)

Read: Duhan Kaplan, "I, Kohelet" (moodle/sophiastreet.com)

Read: Duhan Kaplan, "Ecclesiastes: What's it all about?" (moodle/sophiastreet.com)

Sept 29

Ecclesiastes, continued

Read: Shapiro, *The Way of Solomon*, 95-102, 110-112 (moodle)

Read: Sommer, "Inner-Biblical Interpretation" in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1829-1835

Student Presentation #1

Oct 6

Job; Suffering, Theology

Read: *Job*, excerpts: 1 (full chapter), 2 (full chapter), 3 (full chapter), 4:1-6, 5:6-27, 6:1-26, 7:3-7, 7:13-21, 8:1-7, 9:1-3, 10:1-3, 11:1-19, 12:1-9, 32:1-10, 33:1-16, 34:1-9, 35:1-8, 36:17-20, 37:14-20, 38 (full chapter), 39 (full chapter), 40 (full chapter), 41 (full chapter), 42 (full chapter) in *Jewish Study Bible*

Read: Mitchell, "Introduction," *The Book of Job*, vii-xxxii (moodle)

Oct 13

Job, continued

Read: Baeck, "Job and Kohelet," Buber, "A God Who Hides His Face," and Kaufmann, "Job the Righteous Man and Job the Sage" in Glatzer, ed., 51-70 (moodle)

View Film: *A Serious Man*

Read: Duhan Kaplan, "Job and A Serious Man: Trials of a Generation" (moodle)

Student Presentation #2

Oct 20

Proverbs; Knowledge, Feminism

Read: *Proverbs*, excerpts: 1-9, 10-15, 30-31

Read: Kugel, "Wisdom and the Anthological Temper," in Stern, *The Anthology in Jewish Literature*, 32-52 (moodle)

Oct 27

Fall Break – NO CLASS

Nov 3

Proverbs, continued.

Reading: Radford Reuther, "Mary and Wisdom in Protestant Mystical Millennialism," *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 220-248 (moodle)

Student Presentation #3

Nov 10

Song of Songs; Sexuality, Love, Ecology

Reading: *Song of Songs*, entire book

Read: Berlin, "Reading Biblical Poetry" in *Jewish Study Bible*, 2097-2104

Read: Duhan Kaplan, "Impossible Love" (moodle)

Nov 17

Song of Songs, continued.

Read: Adler, "Two Subjects, One Love" in *Engendering Judaism*, 133-139 (moodle)

Student Presentation #4

Nov 24

Ecclesiasticus/Ben Sirach; Practical Wisdom

Read: *Ecclesiasticus/Ben Sirach*, excerpts:

On wisdom: 1:1-10, 4:11-19; 6:18-37; 14:20-15:10; 24:1-33; 38:24-39:11.

On social justice: 4:1-10; 34:21-27; 35:14-26.

On speech: 5:9-15; 18:15-29; 19:4-17; 20:1-31; 23:7-15; 27:4-7; 27:11-15; 28:8-26.

Dec 1

Ben Sirach, continued; Conclusion

Read: McFague, "How Shall We Live? Christianity and Planetary Economics," *A New Climate for Theology*, 81-97 (moodle)

Dec 16

Papers due: Basic degree credit

Jan 16

Papers due: Advanced degree credit

EXPECTATIONS, ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

FOR ALL STUDENTS (Audit, Certificate credit, Basic credit, Advanced credit):

Attendance: Class attendance meeting VST policies.

Reading: Thoughtful preparation of the assigned readings before the class in which they are due.

Class participation: Includes careful listening and thoughtful responses to class lecture, discussion and reading; engagement in class activities, such as reflective writing or small group discussion.

FOR MOST STUDENTS (Certificate credit, Basic credit, Advanced credit):

Group presentation: Small groups of students (2-4, depending on course enrollment) will work together to prepare a 20-minute presentation on a short passage from that unit's Biblical text, exploring its content and relevance to a contemporary issue. The modality of the presentation can include speaking, drama, music, leading class activities and more. It should, however, include in some way the following elements:

(1) Choose an excerpt from the assigned Biblical reading, 10-20 verses long, depending on context. Explain briefly why your group chose it.

(2) Use one of the interpretive techniques we discussed in the course to explore the passage. Describe the technique, your application of it to the passage, and the new insight it revealed.

(3) Choose a topic of contemporary relevance that came up in your group discussion. Say how your passage offers insight, suggestions, reframes, or questions related to it.

In order that the in-class presentation not have to rigidly follow that outline, the group should prepare a written paper of 750-1000 words summarizing their work on the three elements listed above. The paper is due the day of the presentation. After review by the professor, and completion by students of any suggested revisions, the paper will be shared with the class.

FOR CREDIT STUDENTS (Basic credit, Advanced credit):

Final paper: On a topic of the student's choice, approved by the professor. The final paper should be based on a Wisdom text studied in class, include appropriate outside reading, and demonstrate skill in both interpreting Biblical text and applying it to a contemporary issue. Examples will be discussed in class. Basic-level students complete a 3000-word final paper involving research (10 sources) beyond the course readings. Advanced-level students complete a 5000-word final paper involving significant research (15 sources) beyond the course readings.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adler, Rachel. *Engendering Judaism* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1999.

Bloom, Harold. *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* (New York: Riverhead), 2004.

- Brettler, Marc Zvi. *How to Read the Jewish Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2007.
- Chagall, Marc. *The Bible: Genesis, Exodus, The Song of Solomon* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books), 2007.
- Fox, Michael J. *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society), 2004.
- Edinger, Edward. *Transformation of the God-Image: An Elucidation of Jung's Answer to Job* (Toronto: Inner City Books), 1992.
- Glatzer, Nahum N., ed. *The Dimensions of Job* (New York: Schocken), 1969.
- Mitchell, Stephen. *The Book of Job* (New York: HarperPerennial), 1987.
- McFague, Sallie. *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 2008.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2006.
- Shapiro, Rami. *Ecclesiastes Annotated and Explained* (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Illuminations), 2010.