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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**  
**HB5/742 – Ecclesiastes on Living and Dying**  
**Vancouver School of Theology SUMMER 2018**

**PURPOSE:**

This course is a topical study of the book of Ecclesiastes. We will read Ecclesiastes as a reflection on the joys, difficulties, and frustrations of daily life. After considering, on the first day, how the book reflects on communal and individual experiences in ancient Israel, we will then turn to three case studies: the ethics of work, enjoyment in times of empires, and death and dying. On the final day, we will gather the various strands of these discussions by thinking together about faith in a time of social dislocation. The overall aim is to create a conversation between the biblical text and issues that face us in everyday life. The purpose is *not* to find an ‘answer’ to Ecclesiastes, a final statement about what the book is about. Instead we will draw from its complex and puzzling words suggestions for how to live well in a troubling and often chaotic world.

**EXPECTATIONS AND COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:**

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify and discuss major interpretive cruxes in Ecclesiastes
- Use close reading and exegesis to interpret the text of Ecclesiastes
- Apply their interpretations of Ecclesiastes to contemporary pastoral issues

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

The main text for this course is Ecclesiastes itself. **Before class begins, read it in its entirety several times through.** Please come to the first day having either:

- 1) read the NRSV translation of Ecclesiastes several times through. If possible, read it out loud, preferably in a group or with a partner.
- 2) read Ecclesiastes in several translations, one of which should be the NRSV. We will work from the NRSV in class, but reading several translations will give you a sense of some of the major interpretive cruxes of the book. If possible, read at least one translation out loud, preferably in a group or with a partner.

**Required Books:**

Davis, Ellen. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000. [available on Amazon]

**Note:** only the section on Ecclesiastes (pp. 159-228) is required reading.

Lorde, Audre. *The Cancer Journals*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2006. [Available on Amazon; any edition will do.]

**Note:** Only Chapter II, “Breast Cancer: A Black Lesbian Feminist Experience,” is required reading, though the book is short (79), and rewarding in its entirety.

Tamez, Elsa. *When the Horizons Close: Rereading Ecclesiastes*. Translated by Margaret Wilde. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000. [Available on Amazon]

**Note:** Read the book in its entirety.

### **Required Articles:**

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. "Natural Life" and "The Right to Bodily Life," pp 148-150 and 154-164 in *Ethics*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995. [Will be emailed to students]

Bowler, Kate. "Death, the Prosperity Gospel and Me," *New York Times*, February 13, 2016. [Will be emailed to students]

Pauw, Amy Plantinga. "Introduction: Why Ordinary Time Matters," pp. 1-9 in *Church in Ordinary Time: A Wisdom Ecclesiology*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 2017. [Will be emailed to students]

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

### **Reading and Class Participation:**

All Students including auditors are expected to do all the required readings and participate in class discussions. 100% attendance is required of Certificate and Degree students.

### **Written Assignments:**

1. Certificate students will respond to **one** of the provided case studies in a 5-6 page. The paper should apply a close reading of Ecclesiastes or section of Ecclesiastes to the pastoral situation presented in the case study. Students can **either** write a reflection based on the case study (what are the major issues present in the case study, how might Ecclesiastes speak to these) **or** a script of a conversation between the characters in the case study. If you choose the latter, use footnotes to tie the specifics of the conversation to the course material, that is, to the text of Ecclesiastes itself and to secondary readings.
2. Basic degree students (Diploma; MA; M.Div) will respond to **one** of the provided case studies in a 6-8 page (1500-1875 words). The paper should apply a close reading of Ecclesiastes or section of Ecclesiastes to the pastoral situation presented in the case study. Students can **either** write a reflection based on the case study (what are the major issues present in the case study, how might Ecclesiastes speak to these) **or** a script of a conversation between the characters in the case study. If you choose the latter, use footnotes to tie the specifics of the conversation to the course material, that is, to the text of Ecclesiastes itself and to secondary readings.
3. Advanced degree students (Th.M) have two options:
  - a. You may either choose **one** of the case studies and submit a two-part paper, totaling 15-17 pages (3750-4250 words). The first part should be a script of a conversation between the characters in the case study. Use footnotes to tie the specifics of the conversation to the course material, that is, to the text of Ecclesiastes itself and to secondary readings. The second part should be a commentary on a pertinent short passage from Ecclesiastes (no more than a chapter; I would recommend 12-15

- verses.) The commentary need not have a thesis, but should include discussion of literary devices, themes, the context of the passage, etc. The two parts of the paper should support each other; the conversation in the first part should arise out of the commentary in the second, and the passage should be chosen for its ability to cast light on the topics of the conversation. You may choose the length of each part, but neither should be shorter than 5 pages.
- b. You may submit a research paper on a topic of your choice related to the course. The paper should support a thesis and be 15-17 pages (3750-4250 words).

*Further details about assignments will be provided on the course syllabus, handed out in class*

#### 4. **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Atkinson, Tyler. *Singing at the Winepress: Ecclesiastes and the Ethics of Work*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015.
- Barbour, Jennie. *The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Boda, Mark J., Tremper Longman III, Christian G. Rata (eds.) *The Words of the Wise are Like Goads: Engaging Qohelet in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013.
- Crenshaw, James L. *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writings on Old Testament Wisdom*. Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1995.
- Crenshaw, James L. *Qoheleth: The Ironic Wink*. Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina, 2013.
- Duncan, Julie Ann. *Ecclesiastes*. Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon, 2017.
- Fox, Michael. *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999.
- Jarick, John (ed.) *Perspectives on Israelite Wisdom: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 618, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016.
- Pauw, Amy Plantinga. *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*. Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015.
- Seow, C.L. *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible. Volume 18C. New York: Doubleday, 1997.
- Von Rad, Gerhard. *Wisdom in Israel*. Nashville; New York: Abingdon Press, 1972.