

Rel. 661
2004
Carolyn J. Sharp
a.m.

Spring

T, Th 9:00 - 10:20

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Exorcising Marcion's Ghost: Claiming the Sacred in Difficult Old Testament Texts

The second-century heretic Marcion is by no means the only thoughtful reader of Scripture to have found certain Biblical texts extraordinarily difficult to appropriate for moral instruction, spiritual illumination, or growth in discipleship. The Old Testament presents readers with a number of texts that seem to legitimate disturbing views of the nature of God, God's will for Israel and humankind, and the ways in which human beings may serve and please God. Our purpose in this course will be to attend to the problematic aspects of key Old Testament narrative and poetic material, learning how to discern together creative, courageous ways in which we might contest what is harmful and (re)claim what is sacred in these troubling Biblical texts. Our common learning will focus on the nuanced articulation of our own underlying exegetical assumptions and the exploration of the limitations and possibilities of traditional historical-critical and postmodernist hermeneutical strategies.

The course is organized in seven learning units:

- 1) Faithful Enough to Kill: The Aqedah
- 2) Devoted to Destruction: Holy War Ideology
- 3) Women and Biblical Rhetorics of Sexual Violence
- 4) Idealizing David the Murderer
- 5) Propheying Retribution: Hosea and Ezekiel
- 6) The Harsh God of Job, the Distant God of Qoheleth
- 7) Whose Worship? Psalms of Imprecation

In each learning unit, students will wrestle exegetically with difficult Old Testament texts, exploring a variety of reading strategies for interpreting, honoring, contesting, and re-reading the Biblical material.

Evaluative Measures

Each student's course grade will be determined according to the following evaluative measures:

- 1) A creative written response to a newspaper clipping (provided by the professor) designed to prompt reflection on the relationship between Scripture reading, violence, and life in community (**due February 26**; 25% of grade). Your written response may take the form of a reflection paper, a fictional dialogue, a poem, an extended prayer or series of prayers, a liturgy complete with Scripture readings and hymns, detailed lecture notes for a potential class you might teach, or any other kind of written medium you choose. The length of your response is up to you; it is expected that you will spend at least 8 hours on the project. These will be shared in printed form with the class, so please bring copies for each student and the professor.
- 2) An 11- to 13-page term paper that probes a hermeneutical issue involved in reading a troubling Old Testament passage chosen by the student (**due May 4**; 60% of grade). The term paper must engage critically one of the secondary works featured on our syllabus plus two articles or books not on the syllabus. "Engage critically" here means to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each of the authors' positions *in significant detail* and to reflect on how the authors' arguments have or have not proved useful in your reading of the passage and the construction of your argument.
- 3) Regular class participation (15% of grade). The category of class participation includes conscientious preparation of Biblical and secondary material for class; engagement in class discussions and exercises; and leading of class discussion on assigned secondary reading during the semester.

I will be pleased to provide written comments on drafts of term papers that are given to me by class time on April 8. Considering feedback about a paper's strengths and weaknesses enables the student to improve logic and argumentation, refine written expression, and otherwise strengthen the paper before it receives a grade.

There is no grade penalty of any kind for late work, but any written work turned in after the specified due date will receive no feedback from me other than its grade.

All written work submitted by you must be your own. If you cite, paraphrase, or in any other way rely on ideas, distinctive phrases, or argumentation from a written source, that source must be properly acknowledged. For more information, consult the appendix on plagiarism at the end of this syllabus.

Papers are to be typewritten in a 12-point font, double-spaced, paginated, with margins between 1" and 1 1/4" on all sides. If the paper has notes, they should be footnotes (i.e., located at the bottom of the relevant page) rather than end-notes. Block quotations and footnotes should be single-spaced. A separate bibliography is not necessary if full initial citations of works are provided in the notes. If you are unsure as to proper footnote style, consult *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Hendrickson, 1999), available in the Divinity Library, or another accepted authority such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Required Books

The following books will be used heavily in this class. Additional required readings are available in a photocopied course packet that may be purchased at TYCO, located at 262 Elm Street downtown. The books and TYCO packet will be on Reserve in the Divinity Library, should you prefer to consult them there rather than purchase them. In addition, the readings in the course packet will be available on-line, listed under this course at <http://classes.yale.edu>.

Adam, A. K. M. *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995.

Brueggemann, Walter. *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002.

Diamant, Anita. *The Red Tent*. New York: Picador USA, 1997.

Halpern, Baruch. *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Holy War in Ancient Israel*. Translated by Marva J. Dawn from the 3rd edition of *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel* [Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958]. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

Trible, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. London: SCM, 2002.

Weems, Renita J. *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995.

Zenger, Erich. *A God of Vengeance? Understanding the Psalms of Divine Wrath*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996.

----- Schedule of Class Sessions and Readings
