

Rel. 660
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Wednesdays 1:30 - 4:00 p.m.

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Contemporary Christian Theologies of the Old Testament

Course Description

Christian theologians and clergy have striven since the dawn of the Common Era to formulate comprehensive understandings of the Old Testament that are theologically illuminating, hermeneutically sophisticated, and responsive to the ethical insights of their own times. Contemporary Christian leaders who do not engage this theologically crucial task themselves may end up relying on simplistic formulations that cannot do justice to the profound complexity of the Biblical material, risking reductionism and supersessionism. In this course, we will consider the strengths and vulnerabilities of recent books on Old Testament theology by Brevard Childs, Erhard Gerstenberger, and Walter Brueggemann, along with a book on the applied theology of urban ministry by Mark Gornik. Acknowledging that the subdiscipline of Old Testament theology seems to be dominated by White males from the global North, we will bring these men's theological works into dialogue with liberationist and queer readings by scholars who are not White, not male, and/or not from North America or northern Europe. Students will be encouraged to explore interdisciplinary and intercultural aspects of a broad ranging and lively semester-long conversation about the importance of the Old Testament for Christian theology.

Objectives of the course are:

- * To facilitate students' critical engagement with contemporary theologies of the Old Testament;
- * To heighten students' awareness of reader agency and communal constraints in interpretive processes of reading Scripture, and to strengthen students' grasp of the particular interpretive challenges involved in reading Old Testament texts in the service of Christian theologizing;
- * To equip students for construction of theologies of the Old Testament that are deeply attentive to the Biblical text, aware of the ideologies and hermeneutical assumptions that shape their understandings, and responsive to the priorities and claims of other believers and believing communities that cherish the Old Testament as sacred Scripture; and,

* To foster students' development of increasingly sophisticated exegetical and analytical skills for engagement of the Old Testament in theological reflection.

Evaluative Measures

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

1) A creative theological project that engages an Old Testament passage for a context other than the Biblical studies classroom or academic writing (**due October 26**; 20% of grade). For example, a student may draw on an Old Testament text in order to write a sermon, create a liturgy, design a church workshop or retreat, write a short story, or design the mission statement and administrative structure of a new social justice organization. Detailed annotations (at least 2 full pages) should be supplied that describe the goals of the project. Students will post their projects, with annotations, to a communal electronic space for the class and will be expected to spend some time browsing the site to reflect on what others have done.

2) A term paper (12 to 15 pages) exploring an issue in Old Testament theology identified by the student (**due December 13**; 60% of grade). The term paper must engage critically two of the works featured on our syllabus plus at least one article or book not on the syllabus.

* "Engage critically" here means to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the authors' positions *in significant detail* and to reflect explicitly on how the authors' points are relevant to your argument. Referring briefly once or twice to an author does not constitute adequate critical engagement.

* If your paper is shorter than 12 full pages, it will not be eligible for a grade in the Honors category.

3) Regular class participation (20% of grade). The category of class participation includes:

- * conscientious preparation of Biblical and secondary readings;
- * active engagement in class discussions;
- * occasional leadership of class discussion on secondary readings;
- * brief presentation of the term paper to the class.

Attendance policy: Each student may have one absence from class with no resulting consequences. Please notify me in advance, if possible. If you are absent on a day on which you were scheduled to lead discussion, that will count as two absences. You

need not explain or defend the reason for your absence; I trust that adult learners balance responsibly their academic obligations, health concerns, and other life priorities. Any absences beyond one will result in your class participation grade being lowered significantly. Chronic lateness may eventually be counted as an absence, at my discretion. This policy simply reflects the fact that your absence affects the learning and ethos of the entire group. Your presence and commitment to our common learning are valued.

Policy on late work: 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.

I will be pleased to provide written comments on drafts of term papers that are given to me by class time on **November 30**. 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.

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 endnotes. 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 (articles) are available on Reserve in the Divinity Library. The books are also on Reserve, should you prefer to consult them there rather than purchase them.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997.

Childs, Brevard S. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. London: SCM, 1992.

Gerstenberger, Erhard S. *Theologies in the Old Testament*. Translated by John Bowden. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002.