

**Seminar III The Minister as Theological Interpreter (DM 6463)**  
**Theology of the Biblical Wisdom Literature**

DMin. Seminar  
January 3-7, 2011

Course Description

This interdisciplinary course provides a foundation for your study of the minister as theological interpreter by focusing on the theology of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. These books are loose cannons within the canon, singing out of tune with the rest of Scripture and even with each other. They have been largely ignored by contemporary theologians and are rarely preached from in contemporary western churches. So you may wonder why our class should bother with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes! Here are three reasons:

1. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes speak to our context of religious pluralism. They are both the products of a complex intercultural, interreligious quest for wisdom in the Ancient Near East and exhibit an “intellectual ecumenism,” a willingness to share intellectual resources across boundaries of culture and religion. In our own pluralistic context, this is a virtue that we need to cultivate as well.
2. The theological horizon for both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes is creation, rather than redemption or consummation. In an age when ecological concerns are raising urgent questions about our identity as creatures and our relationship to the rest of creation, these books repay closer study.
3. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes seem to have a special appeal for the religiously disaffected. In their different ways, they set forth theology that grapples honestly with the problems of daily life, and can serve as an attractive path to (or back to) biblical faith for both skeptics and seekers.

Requirements

1. Four required readings plus one additional reading of your choice from the supplemental reading list.
2. Preliminary draft of a Learning Project Prospectus (approximately 10 pages in length), that you will submit to the faculty *and to each other* no later than one week before class begins.
3. One ten-page reflection paper on the readings. You will submit this paper to the faculty no later than one week before class begins.
4. Choose a text from Proverbs or Ecclesiastes to serve as the basis for a short meditation that you will offer to the class during our time together.

Required Readings

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, preferably from *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (NRSV) or *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (NRSV)

Elsa Tamez, *When the Horizons Close: Rereading Ecclesiastes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002)

Ellen Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Westminster Bible Companion) (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000)

David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), vol. 1, pp. 176-332 [NOTE: this is a large, two-volume book, and I do not expect you to buy it, though it is possible to buy only the first volume. If you do not buy it, you still need to have a copy of the assigned pages for use in class.]

**Supplemental Readings** (choose at least one)

William P. Brown, "Calvin and Qoheleth meet after a hard day's night ; or, Does Ecclesiastes have a "Protestant" work ethic?," in Wallace M. Alston and Michael Welker, eds., *Reformed theology: identity and ecumenicity II: biblical interpretation in the Reformed tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), pp. 74-90.

Terence Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), pp. 199-219; 219-247.

Edwin M. Good, "Qoheleth: The Limits of Wisdom" in *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), pp. 168-195.

Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Jesus-Sophia" in *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Discourse*, pp. 150-169.

Amy Plantinga Pauw, "Qohelet and the Missional Church" 2010 Torrance Lectures, University of Aberdeen

Raymond Van Leeuwen, "Wealth and Poverty: System and Contradiction in Proverbs" *Hebrew Studies* 33 (1992):25-36

**All writing assignments are due no later than one week before class begins.**

**Paper # 1**

**The Preliminary Draft Prospectus** is a preliminary exploration of a praxis or practical theology research or inquiry in ministry based on the "Guide to the Doctor of Ministry Learning Project." The First Draft will have been discussed with the At Home Learning Group and the student's advisor prior to submission.

See page 10 of your Doctor of Ministry Guide that covers the sequence of events and contains fuller descriptions of the chapters for more information about the elements of the preliminary draft prospectus.

The paper has three parts:

- I. Context and Problem: A brief description of the pastoral context of the candidate, a problem to be addressed in that context of ministry and preliminary research questions related to that problem.
- II. Interpreting the problem through Biblical and theological reflection and dialogue with other fields of knowledge. Based on the work and readings in Seminars I and II and the readings from this seminar, this section entails an outline of the biblical, theological and other human knowledge sources the student will use to reflect on the problem.  
Ideally at least one theologian will be identified in this section as a major discussion partner in the process of reflecting on and interpreting the problem.

- III. Preliminary ideas about the project strategy to be employed to address the problem and the research questions, including a statement of the goal of the project and the kinds of outcomes anticipated.

**Paper # 2**

**Reflection on Required Readings and Supplemental Reading**

Write a ten-page reflection paper on the four required readings and your choice of supplemental reading. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 font (Times New Roman or similar type). Citations should follow the standard MLA style.

Your paper should be organized around these questions:

- 1. What are the understandings of God in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes? How do these understandings differ from other perceptions of God in the Hebrew Bible?***
- 2. How would you describe Proverbs and Ecclesiastes' overall perspectives on human life? Illustrate with specific texts.***
- 3. Describe two strands in your own culture (these can be religious, economic, political, cultural, etc.) that seem most challenged by the wisdom of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.***

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