OT 217-3 Exegesis of Song of Songs
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Spring 2017: Mondays 2-4:50PM

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“For all of eternity in its entirety is not as worthy as the day on which Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the Writings are holy, but Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies." Rabbi Akiva

“Know, my brother, that you will find many diversities in the interpretation of Song of Songs. In truth they differ because Song of Songs can be compared to a lock whose keys have been lost.” Saadia Gaon, medieval Jewish sage

Course Description:

This biblical elective course provides an in-depth examination of the poetic book of Song of Songs in English translation. This relatively short biblical book presents Christians and Jews with an excellent opportunity to sharpen historical-critical interpretive skills, to develop better literary approaches to biblical poetry, and to deepen our theological imaginations regarding love, sexuality, the body, and gender. Students will gain a toolbox of hermeneutical methods for contemporary ministry and will respond to this biblical book with an appropriate and creative event.
**Course Objectives:**

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe various historical issues, literary features, and theological outlooks of the book of Song of Songs. [Assignments #1, 2, 3]

2. Engage in conversation with various types of biblical scholarship in order to cultivate a sense of their own identity as interpreters. [Assignment #2]

3. Respond appropriately and creatively with pastoral sensitivity, theological imagination, and ethical concern to a biblical text in order to educate a given audience. [Assignment #3]

**Required Course Books:**

1) *Song of Songs: A Commentary* by J. Cheryl Exum (Louisville: WJK, 2005)

2) *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* by Ellen F. Davis (Louisville: WJK, 2000)

Additional readings are available on CAMS, Library Reserve, and through the ATLA database. See Course Schedule for notifications.
Assignments & Evaluation:

1) Attendance & Participation. (30% of final grade)
Students should come to class each day eagerly ready to discuss the assigned readings. Active participation includes, but is not limited to, activities such as listening carefully to others’ presentations and thoughts, taking notes, asking relevant questions, responding to others’ comments, and inviting others into the conversation. It does not include dominating a group or class discussion by constant talking. Monitor and vary your forms of participation; introverts should force themselves to speak more than they think necessary; extroverts should force themselves to speak less than they think necessary.

Students will be expected to take notes (jot down questions, write up summaries, etc.), while reading the assigned texts outside of class so that they have resources in class to use to speak. I expect that students will need at least 6 hours each week to prepare for our approx. 3 hour class; you should not expect to prepare in one setting per week.

Here’s a quick and sketchy grading rubric:
0 – absent without an excuse 85 – present with some participation
70 – absent with an excuse 90 – present and participating readily
75 – present without participation 95 – present, alert, highly participatory
80 – present with limited participation

2) Weekly 2-page Papers. (40% of final grade)
Students will write a 2-page paper in preparation for each class session (excepting the first class); so, 11 papers total. These papers will respond to a specific question or prompt given in this syllabus. A hardcopy of the paper is due in class each week. Students will often use the paper in class to contribute to class participation (in addition to their notes; see above) and will turn it in for grading at the end of each class.

3) Campus-Wide Event in celebration of Love/Poetry/Sex. (30% of final grade)
Students will create an event open to the LPTS community. This event can be a play, a poetry reading, a conference, a concert, a discussion, a workshop, a worship service, etc. or some combination thereof. The event can focus exclusively on human love or sex or love poetry. It needs to incorporate the Song of Songs in some substantial way. You will invite the entire LPTS community—students, staff, faculty, and administration—to this event.
Course Policies:

**Use of Inclusive Language**
In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible’s images for God. More discussion about inclusive language can be accessed from the Academic Support Center and from the section of the LPTS web site with information for current students.

**Academic Honesty**
All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another’s language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For more information, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

**Special Accommodations**
Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

**Citation Policy**
Citations in your papers should follow Seminary standards, which are based on these guides:
Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

**Attendance Policy**
According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Three or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

**Policy on late work**
All written assignments are due on the date given in the syllabus. Assignments submitted late will be penalized in the grading by one letter grade increment for every day (a B+ paper becomes a B if one day late, a B- if two days, a C+ if three days, etc.). Assignments submitted more than ten days after the due date will not be accepted.

**Use of electronic devices in class**
This course is a seminar-style one based on deep engagement with the readings and colleagues. Do not send or read text messages during class. Cell phones should be silenced. In the event that you have a legitimate need to be accessible during class, you may ask me for an exception to this rule. Laptops should not be used if you cannot trust yourself to restrict your use to note-taking and CAMS reading. You may not access the Internet during class time. Any misuse of electronic devices during class time, including checking of email or social networking sites, will be grounds for dismissal from the session and will negatively affect the course grade.
Course Schedule:

Monday, February 6: Introductions

1. Introductions to Course, Syllabus
2. Class Reading of Song of Songs
3. Song of Songs 1:1-4

Recommended Readings:

Exum, 89-97

Davis, 238-243

Monday, February 13: Historical Issues

1. Authorship & Dating of the SoS
3. ANE love poetry

Required Readings:

Exum, 28-33, 42-67

Murphy, Roland. The Song of Songs (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990): 3-6. [CAMS and Library Reserve]


Recommended Readings:


2-page paper topic: Name and describe 3 major historical issues related to the Song of Songs.
Monday, February 20: A Dialogue

1. Song of Songs 1:5 – 2:7
2. Song of Songs 1:5-6 and Race

**Required Readings:**

- Exum, 97-119
- Davis, 243-254

**2-page paper topic:** Use one-page to write about 1:7 – 2:7 in general including one or two interpretive issues therein (e.g. who is speaking and when?); use another page to write about 1:5-6 specifically and the issue of race using the Weems, Sheppard, and Waters readings.

Monday, February 27: Literary Issues & Reception History

1. Genre, metaphor, imagery of flora and fauna, literary structure
2. History of Christian Interpretation & History of Jewish Interpretation

**Required Readings:**

- Exum, 1-13

**2-page paper topic:** What can we, 21st c. interpreters, learn about SofS from the history of its interpretation?
Monday, March 6: Woman’s First Long Speech

1. Song of Songs 2:8 – 3:5, 3:6-11
2. Allusion to SofS in John

Required Readings:

Exum, 119-151

Davis, 254-262


Carr, David. The Erotic Word, 163-167 [CAMS and Library Reserve]

Recommended Readings:


2-page paper topic: Compare and contrast at least 3 different English translations of our focal passage today. Do particular translation choices correspond to the scholarly discussions in Exum, Davis, Fokkelman, and Carr? If you have the ability, check out the Hebrew words that cause different translations.

Monday, March 20: Theological Approaches

Required Readings:

Exum, 73-77

Davis, 231-238


Burrows, Mark S. “Foundations for an Erotic Christology: Bernard of Clairvaux on Jesus as ’Tender Lover,’” Anglican Theological Review 80.4 (Fall 1998): 477-493. [ATLA Database]

2-page paper topic: What is the theology of the Song of Songs? What does the book say about God? About humanity?
Monday, March 27: Man’s First Long Speech

1. Song of Songs 4:1 - 5:1
2. Beauty, the waṣf

Required Readings:

Exum, 151-183
Davis, 262-275


2-page paper topic: Construct a historically and literarily informed interpretation of this passage. Who is speaking to whom about what?
Monday, April 3: Sexuality

1. Sexuality and Spirituality
2. Erotic Love

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


2-page paper topic: What sorts of topics and issues must we examine in order to construct a Christian theology of sexuality?
Monday, April 10: Woman’s Second Long Speech

1. Song of Songs 5:2 – 6:3

Required Readings:

Exum, 183-210

Davis, 275-284


2-page paper topic: Compare and contrast at least 3 different English translations of our focal passage today. Do particular translation choices correspond to the scholarly discussions in Exum, Davis, and Fishbane? If you have the ability, check out the Hebrew words that cause different translations.

Monday, April 17: Interreligious Perspective

1. The Song of Songs in Interreligious Perspective

Required Readings:


W. C. Chittick and P. L. Wilson, Fakhruddin Iraqi: Divine Flashes (Classics of Western Spirituality; New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 82-87. [CAMS]


2-page paper topic: After reading the assigned selections of love/erotic poetry from other world religions, write imaginatively about how we might use these poems to enrich our own reading of Song of Songs? What comparisons can be made? What might the presence of this genre of literature in all the major religions say about the human condition?
Monday, April 24: Man’s Second Long Speech & Woman’s reply

1. Song of Songs 6:4 – 7:9, 7: 10-13

*Required Readings:*

Exum, 210-242

Davis, 284-295


*Recommended Readings:*


2-page paper topic: Select one “reading” of this biblical passage from among Exum, Davis, and the four offered in the Black article. What are the strengths of your selected readings vis-à-vis the other readings? What are the weaknesses?

Monday, May 1: Dialogue

1. Song of Songs 8: 1-14
2. Conclusions

*Required Readings:*

Exum, 242-263

Davis, 295-302

Carr, David, *The Erotic Word*, 134-37 [CAMS]


2-page paper topic: Write about 2 important “lessons” from this semester’s study of the Song of Songs.