

The Ethics of Violence in the Old Testament

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

J-Term 2013: Jan. 3-24

9:30am – 12pm

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“The overwhelming image of God in the Bible is that of a brutal, violent, and vengeful judge. In a world being torn apart by violence, there is no more urgent task than to counter the Bible’s frequent and nauseating portraits of a ruthless and violent deity. The cruelty of God, however, is a problem that almost no one is willing to face squarely, including Christian interpreters.”

Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer in *Jesus against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus* (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 2001), 21.

“As long as there are women and men who still read the Bible for its theo-ethical value...then there remains—for those of us who care to do so—the responsibility to help contemporary readers to read the Bible with a suspicious hope, careful of the Bible’s distortions and mindful of its possibilities.”

Renita J. Weems in *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 123 n. 7.

“All too often we equate piety and devotion with passive obedience to the biblical texts. Resistance, however, can be a sign of a deep piety. While devout people do certainly listen to and read the Bible, they also actively engage it.”

Carol Hess in *Caretakers of Our Common House: Women’s Development in Communities of Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 202.

“Ignoring violent texts is like camping on the bank of a crocodile-infested river. It is dangerous. It is naïve in the extreme. These Leviathan-like texts should be treated with the utmost respect and caution. They can erupt with violent force when it is least expected.”

William W. Emilsen and John T. Squires in “Introduction,” in *Validating Violence—Violating Faith? Religion, Scripture and Violence*, ed. William W. Emilsen and John T. Squires (Adelaide: ATF, 2008), xiii.

Course Description

The Old Testament attributes a great amount of violence to God and to humanity. In fact, the violent nature of the Hebrew Bible hinders many contemporary Christian readers from engaging significantly with large portions of biblical books. This biblical elective course focuses attention on problematic biblical passages in order to understand and claim—not ignore—their theologically and ethically problematic nature as well as seek new theologically rich and ethically responsible understandings of the texts. After introductions to religious violence, Christianity’s understanding of war and violence, and current Christian notions of nonviolence, the course will focus primarily on two themes: “holy war”/conquest & violence and women.

Prerequisite: Scripture I

Course Objectives

Students completing this course will be able to:

- 1) Name and describe the ethical and theological problems presented in a selection of Old Testament texts that portray violent actions—human and divine.
- 2) Describe Christianity’s engagement with violence including the tradition’s affirmation and rejection thereof.
- 2) Evaluate selected scholarly and popular interpretations of these problematic texts.
- 3) Construct new readings of these problematic texts.
- 4) Design a Christian Education project related to violence in biblical texts.

Required Books

- 1) Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (New York & London: T&T Clark, 2010).
- 2) Jenkins, Philip. *Laying Down the Sword: Why We Can’t Ignore the Bible’s Violent Verses* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).
- 3) Reimer, A. James. *Christians and War: A Brief History of the Church’s Teachings and Practices* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).
- 4) Seibert, Eric A. *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament’s Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012).
- 5) Weems, Renita. *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).
- 6) Wink, Walter. *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

Assignments & Evaluation

1) Attendance, Participation, & Prompts (30%) See Appendix A for grading rubric.

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend “all scheduled meetings of the courses” excepting illness or “other valid reasons.” In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify me of their planned absence from class preferably prior to the session.

Because of the nature of a J-term course (in which each J-term class day equals roughly one normal semester week), students are not allowed to miss *more than 2* class days and receive credit. Tardiness also affects classroom dynamics; please make every effort to be ready to start class on time.

Students should come to class each day eagerly ready to discuss with partners, in small groups, or with the whole class 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.

Students should bring to class each day a “prompt”—concise reflections on the major issue(s) and 1-2 questions that will help facilitate discussion. Freedom is granted to the student to prepare these prompts as best fits your learning style, but I expect that each prompt would fill at least half a page of notebook or computer paper. Students can choose to annotate their books and articles or type summaries of them, but a “prompt” goes beyond these summary notes to probe issues and ask questions. Students will receive a daily grade that factors in their attendance, participation, and “prompts.”

2) Table Leadership (33%) See Appendix B for further information and grading rubrics.

Each student will lead her/his table on three occasions during the term. Leading a table, in brief, means that you are in charge of the table and its members for the entire class day. If we break into table discussions, you will facilitate them and report to the whole class. If the table wishes to join its discussion with another table, you will issue the invitation. If the table hungers or thirsts, you will provide for them. If the table wishes to engage in nonviolent resistance, you will foster the movement! At a more formal level, your table leadership will also include presentations and textual exercises for your table.

Further information about the culture of table will be provided throughout the course.

3) Book Review of *Laying Down the Sword* (17%) Due Monday, January 28.

Students will write a 5 page review of Jenkins’ book focusing on 3 general questions: 1) What does Jenkins do well in the book? 2) What does Jenkins do poorly? 3) How might you use this popular book within a congregation? The goal of the assignment centers on applying the critical biblical scholarship you are learning to a more popular presentation of the topic of violence and the Bible. In other words, as a budding theologian, how might you bridge the divide between the academy and the church by using your knowledge of biblical scholarship to critique/augment/enhance the congregation’s spiritual life as they read an introductory book?

Further details will be given for this assignment in a handout.

4) Practical Theological / Christian Education Project (20%) Due Monday, February 4.

Students will develop a practical theological project that describes how a religious leader might present the course material (or a portion thereof) to a Christian congregation (or subset thereof).

Further details will be given for this assignment in a handout.

Course Policies:

Academic Honesty: All work turned in 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 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. Multiple occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues relating to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center and should make use of the available resources at an *early* date, since violations of seminary policy on academic honesty can lead to a failing grade for the course.

Citation Policy:

Citations in your papers should follow the Seminary standard, which is based on these guides:

Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

The Chicago Manual of Style, 15th ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Accessibility and Accommodation: Students requiring accommodation for a physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center (kmapes@lpts.edu) within the first few days of the course and should speak with me as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments.

Inclusive Language: Our use of language, personally and as a community, is a powerful tool of both healing and oppression. In order to establish a more egalitarian environment and 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. Avoid language for people that excludes part of the population or perpetuates stereotypes. Do not assume masculine gender when the gender of the person is unknown. See http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp.

When referring to God, students are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors. The God of the Hebrew Bible is envisioned in both personal and non-personal ways, as well as

masculine and feminine terms. Naming God exclusively as “He” does not capture this splendid diversity.

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: I ask that we create a time and space in the classroom to set aside such distractions as email, Facebook, and texting in order to engage our minds and hearts. Do not send or read text messages during class. Cell phones should be turned off. 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. 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

Introduction

Thursday, January 3

Opening Table Liturgy

Introduction to course/syllabus

Table Culture

Defining terms, creating frameworks: Religion/Theology/Violence

Friday, January 4

The Nonviolence of Jesus

Christian Ethics, Violence, and Pacifism I

Christian Approaches to violence

Class Readings:

entirety of Wink, Walter. *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*

Table Leadership Presentation #1:

Cahill, Lisa Sowle. *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Fortress, 1994): 1-14, 205-230. [CAMS]

Monday, January 7

Christian Ethics, Violence, and Pacifism II

Class Readings:

Grimsrud, Ted & Christian Early, "Prologue: Christian Pacifism in Brief," in Yoder, John Howard. *A Pacifist Way of Knowing: John Howard Yoder's Nonviolent Epistemology* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2010): 1-21. [CAMS]

Seibert, Eric. *The Violence of Scripture*, Chapters 1 & 2, pg. 1-26.

Table Leadership Presentation #2:

Murphy, Nancey, "John Howard Yoder's Systematic Defense of Christian Pacifism," in *The New Yoder* (eds. Peter Dula and Chris Huebner; Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2010): 42-69. [CAMS]

Tuesday, January 8

Introduction to Violence in the Old Testament

Survey of Problems and Issues related specifically to HB/OT

Class Readings:

Davies, Eryl. *The Immoral Bible*, Chapter 1, pages 3-21.

Seibert, Eric. *The Violence of Scripture*, Chapters 3&4, pg 27-57.

Table Leadership Presentation #3:

Collins, John J. "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," JBL 122.1 (2003): 3-21. [CAMS]

Optional Readings:

Hanson, Paul. "War and Peace in the Hebrew Bible," Interpretation 38 (1984): 341-62. [CAMS]

Violence as War / "Holy War"

Wednesday, January 9

Christians and War

Class Readings:

Entirety of Reimer, A. James. *Christians and War: A Brief History of the Church's Teachings and Practices* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

Thursday, January 10

Exodus and the Warrior God: Y-WH is a Warrior

Class Readings:

Miller, Patrick D. "God the Warrior: A Problem in Biblical Interpretation and Apologetics." Interpretation 19.1 (1965): 39-46. [CAMS]

Lilly, Ingrid E. "What about War and Violence in the Old Testament?" in *A Faith Not Worth Fighting For* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2012): 125-139. [CAMS]

Exodus 14:24-15:5

Table Leadership Presentation #4:

Seibert, Eric. *The Violence of Scripture*, Chapters 5&6, pg. 61-92.

Friday, January 11

Holy War Legislation: Ex 23:20-33; Deut 7

Thou Shalt Not Kill/Murder: Ex 20:13 & Deut 5:17

End of Week Table Liturgy & Communion

Class Readings:

Yoder, John Howard. *To Hear The Word* (2nd edition; Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2010): 38-46. [CAMS]

Seibert, Eric. *The Violence of Scripture*, Chapter 8, pg 113-128.

Table Leadership Biblical Texts #1:

Deuteronomy 20

Monday, January 14

Conquest I (Joshua) and Holy War

Herem and Jericho

Class Readings:

Seibert, Eric. *The Violence of Scripture*, Chapter 7, pg. 95-112.

Davies, Eryl. *The Immoral Bible*, Chapter 2, pages 22-43.

Joshua 1-2

Table Leadership Biblical Texts #2:

Joshua 5:13-6:27

Tuesday, January 15

Conquest II (Joshua) and Holy War

Herem and Ai

Class Readings:

Davies, Eryl. *The Immoral Bible*, Chapters 3&4, pages 44-100.

Table Leadership Biblical Texts #3:

Joshua 7:1-8:29

Wednesday, January 16

Conquest III (Judges) and Holy War

Class Readings:

Davies, Eryl. *The Immoral Bible*, Chapters 5&6, pages 101-138.

Table Leadership Biblical Texts #4:

Judges 1:1-2:5

Violence & Women

Thursday, January 17

Domestic Violence and Rape: Dinah & Tamar

Class Readings:

Bowen, Nancy. "Women, Violence, and the Bible" in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006): 186-199. [CAMS]

Scholz, Susanne, "Breaking the Silence: The Legacy of Acquaintance Rape," in *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010): 27-42. [CAMS]

Genesis 34 & 2 Samuel 13:1-22

Table Leadership Midwives of Peace #1

Friday, January 18

The Levite's "Concubine" and the End of Judges

End of Week Table Liturgy & Communion

Class Readings:

Lapsley, Jacqueline. *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Westminster John Knox, 2005): 35-67. [CAMS]

McClure, John S. & Nancy J Ramsay, *Telling the Truth: Preaching about Sexual and Domestic Violence* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998): 133-35; 141-43 [CAMS]

Seibert, Eric. *The Violence of Scripture*, Chapter 9, pg. 129-146.

Judges 19-21

Table Leadership Midwives of Peace #2

Monday, January 21

MLK Day – No Class

Tuesday, January 22

Marriage Metaphor in the Prophetic Literature

Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah, Ezekiel

Class Readings:

Weems, Renita J. *Battered Love*, Chapters 1-2

Yee, Gale A. “Faithless Israel in Hosea: She Is Not My Wife and I Am Not Her Husband,” in *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003): 81-109. [CAMS]

Hosea 1-3; Jeremiah 16; Ezekiel 24

Table Leadership Midwives of Peace #3

Wednesday, January 23

Marriage Metaphor Revisited

Class Readings:

Weems, Renita J. *Battered Love*, Chapters 3-4

Sakenfeld, Katharine Doob. “Gomer: Who Betrayed Whom? Hosea 1-3,” in *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003): 91-115. [CAMS]

Table Leadership Midwives of Peace #4

Thursday, January 24

Concluding Thoughts on Violence and the Old Testament

Discussion of Christian Ed Projects

Closing Table Liturgy & Communion

Class Readings:

Seibert, Eric. *The Violence of Scripture*, Chapter 10, pg. 147-157.