

**The Ethics of Violence in the Old Testament**  
(Divine Violence: Ethical Frames for Violent Portraits)  
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary  
Summer 2018

Friday, June 1 | Monday, June 4 | Tuesday, June 5 | Wednesday, June 6 | Friday, June 8

9am-5pm each day

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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.

“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***

This course introduces the challenging ethical topic of divine violence—violence performed by God and on God’s behalf—in the Old Testament. This is a major theme in ancient Israelite religion and politics and a major concern for contemporary readers. Understanding the Old Testament, especially its God, requires comprehending the ways in which God is represented as participating in violence. Biblical authors chiefly present God’s role in violence without critique, portraying God as a warrior who fights for Israel, as a war leader who commands Israel also to fight, as an indiscriminate executor of individuals and groups, as judge who requires the death penalty for certain disobediences, and as a husband ready to inflict harm on his wife.

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.

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) Evaluate selected scholarly interpretations of these problematic biblical texts.
- 3) Construct new theological and ethical readings of these problematic texts.

### ***Required Books*** (on Library Reserve)

- 1) Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (New York & London: T&T Clark, 2010).
- 2) Seibert, Eric A. *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).
- 3) Creach, Jerome F. D. *Violence in Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

## *Assignments & Evaluation for a Seminar Style Class*

### **1) Attendance & Participation.** (50% of final grade)

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend “all scheduled meetings of the courses” excepting illness or “other valid reasons.” Given that this course meets intensively for five days, absences are not allowed.

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.

Students may want 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 about various subjects.

### **2) Pre-Class Paper on *The Violence of Scripture*.** (25% of final grade) **Due Friday, June 1.**

Students will write a 6 page paper in preparation for class. This paper will summarize and analyze major components of Seibert’s *The Violence of Scripture*. A hardcopy of the paper is due in class on the first day. Students will 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 the first day of class.

1. Read Seibert’s *The Violence of Scripture* and take good notes (perhaps chapter summaries). You will need these notes to help you participate in class.
2. Write a 2-page response to chapters 2-4. Do not summarize the content; respond to his argument. Did you know about the Old Testament’s “troubling legacy”? What do you think about his distinction between “virtuous” and “wrongful” violence? Are you a “compliant” reader or a “conversant” reader?
3. Write a 2-page summary of the 5 steps in reading nonviolently as presented by Seibert in chapter 6. Summarize the steps. We will be using this methodology in class. And you will use it in your final paper.
4. Write a 2-page response to either Chapter 7 or 8 or 9. In these chapters, Seibert uses his strategies to read actual texts of violence. Pick one of the chapters and evaluate his interpretation.

### **3) Post-Class Paper on Biblical Text.** (25% of final grade) **Due Monday, July 2.**

Students will write a 10-12 page paper after the class. This paper will utilize various interpretive strategies presented in the class to exegete and ethically read a biblical passage concerning divine violence. A handout with more information will be given.

### ***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*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. You can check out a copy at the library circulation desk: LB 2369 .T8 2018

*The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15<sup>th</sup> 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 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](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.

## Course Schedule

Friday, June 1, 2018

### INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction to course/syllabus
2. Defining terms, a few examples
3. Introduction to Violence in the Old Testament, Seibert Part I
4. Christian Ethics & Violence
5. Seibert's 5 Steps, Part II
6. Nadab and Abihu's Unholy Fire: Lev. 10:1-2

#### *Required Readings:*

Seibert, Eric. *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012).

Davies, Eryl. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 3-21.

Creach, Jerome F. D. *Violence in Scripture* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2013), 1-15.

#### *Suggested Readings:*

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

Green, Joel and Jacqueline Lapsley, eds. *The Old Testament and Ethics: A Book-By-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2013): 14-36. [On reserve in library]

Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl A. *Violence and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006): 1-24. [CAMS]

Klawans, Jonathan. "Introduction: Religion, Violence, and the Bible," in *Religion and Violence: The Biblical Heritage* (eds. D.A. Bernat and J. Klawans; Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007): 1-15. [CAMS]

Seibert, Eric A. "Recent Research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament (with Special Attention to Christian Theological Perspectives)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 15.1 (2016): 8-40. [through ATLA database]

**Monday, June 4, 2018**

**GOD THE DIVINE WARRIOR**

1. Exodus and the Warrior God: Y-WH is a Warrior: Exodus 14:1-31
2. ANE Divine Warriors
3. Ethical Readings: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence
4. Evolutionary Approach to Biblical Ethics

*Required Readings:*

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

Kang, Sa-Moon. *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989): 31-42, 114-125, 197-204. [CAMS]

Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 22-43.

Creach, Jerome F. D. *Violence in Scripture* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2013), 47-60, 70-72.

*Suggested Readings:*

Claassens, L. Juliana M. *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012). [On reserve in library]

**Tuesday, June 5, 2018**

**THE COMMANDER GOD**

1. Holy War Legislation: Ex 23:20-33; Deut 7 and 20.
2. Conquest I (Joshua) and Holy War: H̄erem and Jericho
3. Conquest II (Joshua) and Holy War: H̄erem and Ai
4. Conquest III (Judges) and Holy War
5. Reimagining the Coalition of Violence
6. Canonical Approaches

*Required Readings:*

Creach, Jerome F. D. *Violence in Scripture* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2013), 97-124.

Seibert, Eric. *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009): 140-144, 169-173. [CAMS]

Warrior, Robert Allen, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today," in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (eds. R. S. Sugirtharajah; Maryknoll, New York/London: Orbis/SPCK, 1995): 277-285. [CAMS]

Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 63-100. (skip chapter 3)

*Suggested Readings:*

Seibert, Eric. *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012): 73-92. [On reserve in library]

Seibert, Eric. *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009): 169-181. [CAMS]

Brueggemann, Walter. *Divine Presence amid Violence: Contextualizing the Book of Joshua* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2009). (On reserve in library)

Earl, Douglas S. *The Joshua Delusion? Rethinking Genocide in the Bible* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2010). (On reserve in library)

Kang, Sa-Moon. *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989): 80-84, 142-147. [CAMS]

Wednesday, June 6, 2018

**THE PUNISHING GOD & THE ABUSER GOD**

1. Punishing God Portrait: The Flood: Genesis 6-8
2. Abuser God: Marriage Metaphor in the Prophetic Literature: Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 16, Ezekiel 24
3. Ethical Frames
4. Paradigmatic Approaches

*Required Readings:*

Fretheim, Terence E. "The God of the Flood Story and Natural Disasters," *Calvin Theological Journal* 43.1 (April 2008): 21-34. [through ATLA database]

Creach, Jerome F. D. *Violence in Scripture* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2013), 34-42.

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]

Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 101-119.

*Suggested Readings:*

Schlimm, Matthew Richard, *This Strange and Sacred Scripture: Wrestling with the Old Testament and Its Oddities* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2015): 62-83. [On reserve in library]

Thompson, John L. *Reading the Bible with the Dead: What You Can Learn from the History of Exegesis That You Can't Learn From Exegesis Alone* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 93-111. [CAMS]



**Friday, June 8, 2018**

**THE IRASCIBLE GOD & THE RELENTING GOD**

1. Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant: 2 Sam 6
2. The Golden Calf Story: Exodus 32

*Class Readings:*

Long, Thomas G. "The Fall of the House of Uzzah...and Other Difficult Preaching Texts," *Journal for Preachers* 7 no 1 (Advent 1983): 13-19. [through ATLA database]

Davies, Eryl W. *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 120-138.

Fretheim, Terence E. *Exodus* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991): 280-287. [CAMS]