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**BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND THE WISDOM TRADITION  
TH3053 / OT3053  
SPRING 2008**

**W/F, 8:30 am – 9:50 am  
Gardencourt 206**

*This online syllabus should be used to gain a better understanding of the content and focus of a course. The syllabus given out in the class may differ from this online version and its content supersedes that of the online syllabus.*

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Come and sit at the feet of Woman Wisdom and Qohelet. Explore the riches of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, texts that are frequently neglected in the world of biblical theology, and reflect on their trajectories in the Bible, Christian theology, and beyond.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

The course aims to increase acquaintance with the genre of Wisdom literature in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, in particular as it found expression in the books Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, while considering the content and shape of Wisdom in its wider context elsewhere in the ancient Near East. Major concerns of Wisdom and their distinct modes of expression should come into view while we consider also the form this type of literature may take in our time and place. Finally a clearer understanding should be reached of the connections between the concerns of Wisdom and some major issues in contemporary Christian theology.

**Requirements**

1. Attendance and informed participation: (25%)

Please notify the instructors if you will have to miss class.

2. Proverbs Notebook: (25%)

Keep a notebook in which you record proverbs that are accepted in your culture and compare and contrast them with biblical proverbs. This will be due on March 7. See assignment details below.

3. Ecclesiastes Take-Home assignment (25%)

This assignment will be done as a take-home test to be completed by April 18. Specific questions for this assignment will be handed out by the instructors. General questions to be addressed: In what ways can Ecclesiastes be seen as a commentary on other wisdom texts? How does its “wisdom” compare to that of Proverbs when it comes to how to live one’s life? What strands of your own culture seem most challenged by the wisdom of Ecclesiastes?

#### 4. Final Project (25%)

Choose a topic for a final project in consultation with your instructors. This can take the form of an exegetical paper, a sermon, or a theological reflection on an aspect of Wisdom. The final project will be due on Monday, May 12.

**We highly recommend that students take advantage of the services of the Academic Support Center, located on the lower level of Nelson Hall, in preparing their written assignments for this course.**

#### **Required Texts:**

1. Ellen Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs (Westminster Bible Companion)* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), referred to in the syllabus as Davis
2. Roland Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) (Eerdmans, 2002), referred to in the syllabus as Murphy
3. Elsa Tamez, *When the Horizons Close: Rereading Ecclesiastes* (Orbis, 2002), referred to in the syllabus as Tamez
4. *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (NRSV) or *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (NRSV). *The Jewish Study Bible* is also a helpful resource, but not required. Students should bring a Bible to class each time.

#### **Reserve Readings on BlackBoard:**

Leo Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History*, 37-58; 59-76; 161-191; 216.

Johanna Bos, "The Paths of Wisdom," in *Reimagining God: the Case for Scriptural Diversity*, pp. 78-88.

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

Claudia Camp, "Wise and Strange," *Semeia* 42 (1988)

Silvia Schroer, "The Justice of Sophia: Biblical Wisdom Traditions and Feminist Discourses" in Aquino and Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *In the Power of Wisdom*, pp. 67-77.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Sisters of Wisdom-Sophia: Justified by All Her Children" in *Sharing her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context*, pp. 160-183.

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

Christine Roy Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 73-110.

Edwin M. Good, "Qoheleth: The Limits of Wisdom" in *Irony in the Old Testament*, pp. 168-195.

John Barton, "An Example: Ecclesiastes" in *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, pp. 61-76.

Phyllis Trible, "A Striving After Wind" in John R. Donahue, ed., *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), pp. 292-296.

J. Robert Wright, ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 101-107; 217-228.

Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, Book III, section 2, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V, pp. 137-142.

Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 42-88.

Martin Luther, "Notes on Ecclesiastes," in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 15, Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. and trans. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1972), pp. 7-48.

Nancy Chinn and Harriet Gleeson, *Wisdomsearches: Seeking the Feminine Presence of God* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1999), pp. 9-10; 17-19; 27-28; 47; 49-50; 57-58; 71; 80-82

Golka, Friedemann W. *The Leopard's Spots: Biblical and African Wisdom in Proverbs* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), pp. 36-53.

*SHARING WISDOM: The Amritsar Declaration*, accessible at <http://www.elijah-interfaith.org/836>

### **Academic honesty**

All work you submit in this course is expected to be yours. Any quotation of the words of others must be clearly indicated, and all direct indebtedness must be acknowledged by citation of author and source. 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.

### **Inclusive Language:**

The use of inclusive language in course work is a policy of Louisville Presbyterian Seminary. In your writing, avoid language for people that leaves out part of the population or perpetuates stereotypes. Avoid gender specific pronouns when gender is unknown. Gender specific pronouns should generally be avoided when referring to God unless you are quoting from a theological text or a translation of the Bible that uses them.

## **Schedule of classes and assignments** **W/F, 8:30 am – 9:50 am**

### **Week 1**

<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Subject/Assignment</u></b>
F      2/8	Introductions <b>The Genre of Wisdom</b> "Where is Wisdom found?"

<u>Date</u>	<u>Subject/Assignment</u>
W 2/13	<p><b>Proverbs 1-9: The Structure of the Collection</b>  Assigned readings: Perdue, 37-58.  Murphy, 1-30; Davis, 1-24.  Proverbs 1-9</p>
F 2/15	<p><b>The figure of Woman Wisdom</b>  Assigned reading: Bos, 78-88;  Proverbs 1:20-33; 3:13-26; 4:1-9; 8:1-36; 9:1-6</p>
W 2/20	<p><b>Woman Wisdom continued</b>  Assigned reading: Murphy, 133-149;  Davis, 25-74; Fretheim, 199-219</p>
F 2/22	<p><b>“Wise and Strange: the choice of two paths”</b>  Assigned reading: Camp; Schroer  Proverbs 2:1-22; 5:12-23;7:1-27</p>
W 2/27	<p><b>Proverbs 10-31: Themes of the Collection</b>  Assigned reading: Davis, 75-109  Proverbs 10-31</p>
F 2/29	<p><b>Themes continued</b>  Assigned reading: Perdue, 59-76;  Davis, 109-155</p>
W 3/5	<p><b>A Woman of Substance</b>  Assigned reading: Fiorenza, Johnson, Yoder  Proverbs 31: 10-31</p>
F 3/7	<p><b>Proverbs Notebooks Due</b></p>
W 3/12	<p><b>“Why is This in the Bible?”</b>  Assigned reading: Davis, 159-169;  Murphy, 49-63; Perdue, 161-191</p>
F 3/14	<p><b>A Timely Book</b>  Assigned reading: Tamez, 1-55;  Ecclesiastes 1:1-2:26</p>

<u>Date</u>		<u>Subject/Assignment</u>
W	3/19	<b>Telling Time</b> Assigned reading: Davis, 169-193; Ecclesiastes 3:1-5:7
F	3/21	GOOD FRIDAY – NO CLASS
3/24-3/28		RESEARCH AND STUDY WEEK
W	4/2	<b>Economics</b> Assigned reading: Davis, 193-198; Tamez, 56-91 Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:12
F	4/4	<b>Discernment</b> Assigned reading: Davis, 198-215 Tamez, 92-119 Ecclesiastes 7:1-9:12
W	4/9	<b>Youth and Old Age</b> Assigned reading: Davis, 215-228 Tamez, 119-138 Ecclesiastes 9:13-12:14
F	4/11	<b>The Limits of Wisdom</b> Assigned reading: Good; Murphy, 111-131
W	4/16	<b>Qohelet's Wisdom</b> Assigned reading: Barton; Tamez, 143-154
F	4/18	<b>Wisdom across the Hebrew Scripture</b> <b>Ecclesiastes Take-Home Due</b> Assigned reading: Murphy, 33-48; 97-110; Fretheim, 219-247 Job 38-41
W	4/23	<b>Wisdom's Trajectories</b> <b>(Apocrypha)</b> Murphy, 65-96 Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 1:1-10; 24:1-22

<u>Date</u>		<u>Subject/Assignment</u>
		Wisdom of Solomon, chs. 6-11
F	4/25	<b>Wisdom's Trajectories (New Testament)</b> Assigned reading: Tribble; John 1:1-18; 1 Cor. 1: 18-31
W	4/30	<b>Wisdom's Trajectories (Early church)</b> Assigned reading: Wright, ed., Gregory of Nyssa
F	5/2	<b>Wisdom's Trajectories (Medieval and Reformation)</b> Assigned reading: Newman; Luther
W	5/7	<b>Wisdom's Trajectories (Contemporary)</b> Assigned reading: Chinn and Gleeson; Golka; <i>The Amritsar Declaration</i>
F	5/9	Conclusion <b>Final Project due May 12</b>
		Last Day of Class

### **Proverbs Notebook guidelines**

All participants will keep a notebook in which they record proverbs/sayings that are familiar from their culture and context. Write no fewer than five proverbs/sayings and discuss them guided by the steps outlined below.

The notebook should be ready for review by March 7 and students should be prepared to read and explain one saying to the class on that date.

1. Write down the proverb/saying. If the original language in which it occurs is different than English, cite in original and translation.
2. Describe briefly the meaning of the proverb/saying.
3. Describe the context in which the proverb/saying was/is used. Who uses it? What is the purpose of the usage? How do you experience its use?

4. Do you know the historical and/or literary roots of the saying? Does it describe a cultural or family characteristic which makes it unique? Is it a saying that could easily be shared by other cultures?
5. Compare the saying with a biblical proverb. Note contrasts and similarities.