



Department of Theology, Reinbolt Hall, One Camino Santa Maria, San Antonio, TX 78228

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# TH6313, Wisdom Literature

Fall 2015, Thursdays 6:30–9:15 pm, Blume Library 113 and distance learning technology

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Office hours: Mondays 4:30–6:00, Wednesdays 10:30–noon, Thursdays 4:00–5:00, and by appointment.

Course website: <http://palimpsest.stmarytx.edu/thanneken/th6313/>

The site is restricted to students for copyright reasons. Log in with your stmarytx.edu username and the last four digits of your student id number.

## Course Description

This course will examine the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible (Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes) and the Greek Bible (Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon). We will also consider the context of wisdom in Ancient Israel, the Ancient Near East, the Hellenistic world, and Early Judaism. The primary focus will be the literary study of each book on its own and in conversation with the tradition. We will seek to understand the diversity of questions and answers offered by the literature. Additional foci include the historical and social context of the composition of each book, the influence of the literature on Jewish and Christian thought, and the relevance of the literature in the life of the church today, including personal spirituality and social concerns.

## Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course the student should be able to:

- Distinguish between the historical contexts of composition, development in the tradition, and our own times.
- Express understanding of the questions raised in the ancient wisdom tradition.
- Express distinctions between the different answers proposed in the literature.
- Critically reflect on the influence and implications of the traditional questions and answers in today's world.
- Demonstrate awareness of the historical context of the wisdom traditions in general and individual books, and why it matters.
- Demonstrate awareness of the concerns and tools that modern scholarship has brought to the literature.

## Required Texts

At least one scholarly translation of the Christian Bible using the New American Bible (NAB, Catholic) or New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha (NRSV, Protestant). The Jewish

Publication Society translation is also very good, but does not include Sirach or the Wisdom of Solomon.

Murphy, Roland E. *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Collins, John J. *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997.

O'Connor, Kathleen M. *The Wisdom Literature*, Message of Biblical Spirituality 5. Collegeville: Liturgical, 1993.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987. (or the Spanish original, *Hablar de Dios desde el sufrimiento del inocente*)

Collins, John J. *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Second Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014.

Additional readings will be available from the course website.

## **Responsibilities**

Informed participation begins with coming to class having thought about the readings and being prepared to discuss difficulties and key points. Besides offering answers, participation includes asking questions and participating in discussion. Each student should draw from his or her academic and professional background to offer insights on the topic at hand. Each student's contribution will be unique. Since the class meets only once per week missing more than one class meeting becomes a cause for concern.

On occasion students will be asked to make brief presentations or lead discussion based on course readings and their research for papers.

The final exam will focus on objective knowledge and synthesis of information across the course.

The final paper should demonstrate the ability to do scholarly research in the study of biblical literature and its history of interpretation. The paper should be grounded in the themes of the course and take account of information and arguments encountered in the course. Additionally, the paper should make a more advanced argument on a focused topic, based on research in primary and scholarly sources. The rough expectation is 15 pages of original argument (excluding block quotations, title page, bibliography, appendices, etc.), and engagement with several reliable and recent scholarly treatments.

## **Evaluation**

40% Participation (including attendance and short presentations)

30% Exam (December 10 at the normal class time)

30% Paper (Due December 14)

## **University Policies**

All university policies apply to this course, including the grading scale, policy on academic honesty, study week, the disability statement, and the following policy revised and approved last year:

### *Title IX Responsibilities*

St. Mary's University seeks to provide an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have been the victim of sexual harassment/misconduct/assault we encourage you to report this. If you report this to a faculty or staff member, she or he must notify the University's Title IX coordinator about the basic facts of the incident (you may choose whether you or anyone involved is identified by name). The Title IX coordinator will assist you in connecting with all possible resources both on and off campus. For more information please go to <https://www.stmarytx.edu/about/title-ix/>.

### **Schedule**

August 20, Introductions

August 27, Wisdom in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East

September 3, Proverbs

September 10, Job, Introduction

September 17, Job, Key Passages and Themes

September 24, Job, Gutiérrez and 42:6

October 1, Ecclesiastes, Introduction

October 8, Ecclesiastes, Opening and Conclusion

October 15, Sirach, Introduction

October 22, Sirach, Key Themes

October 29, Sirach, Revealed Wisdom

November 5, Wisdom of Solomon, Introduction

November 12, Wisdom of Solomon and Philo

November 19, Dead Sea Scrolls

November 26, Thanksgiving, no class meeting

December 3, Discussion of works in progress

December 10, Final Exam

*Last updated August 17, 2015*