

June 14, 2017

Canadian Mennonite University

War and Divine Violence in the Bible

BTS-5080M-1
3 credit hours
Graduate Syllabus
Draft

Spring 2018
May 14-18, 2018
9:00 am– 5:00 pm

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Note: Because of the intensive character of this course, students are required to have read Sprinkle, Preston. *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence* and Eric Siebert, “Evaluating Disturbing Divine Behavior,” pp. 183-207, for the first day of class and be ready to discuss them.

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will explore the various manifestations of violence attested in the Old Testament and the New. It will include an examination of the following topics: the nature of God as outlined in the Genesis creation account; the biblical view of the origin of evil (Genesis 2-4), the curse motif in the Sinai Covenant and the prophetic literature, the practice and theory of war in the ancient Near East and the Old Testament, the war motif in the New Testament. We will also closely examine Jesus’ attitude towards the Old Testament and the God of the Old Testament in an effort to articulate more clearly how a Christocentric approach should orient our assessment of Yahweh’s association with violence in the Old Testament.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

- A. Students will have the opportunity to become more familiar with the history, theory and practice of war in general.
- B. Students will be given the opportunity to define more precisely the nature of the problem pertaining to the presence of divine violence in the Bible.
- C. Students will develop a hermeneutical approach that integrates the ultimate revelation of God in Jesus Christ with the Old Testament’s portrayal of God as divine warrior.
- D. Students will become familiar with the major solutions that have been offered to account for the presence of divine violence in the Old and New Testaments.
- E. Students will explore and reflect on the biblical portrayal of the ultimate genesis of evil and violence in human history.
- F. Students will become familiar with the major Old and New Testament texts that associate God with war. Special attention will be given to the Conquest.
- G. Students will have the opportunity to reflect on the relationship between divine violence and justice.
- H. Students will have the opportunity to articulate their own conclusions about God’s association with war in the Bible and formulate the implications of their conclusions for their understanding of who God is and how he works in human history.

III. TEXTBOOKS

Sprinkle, Preston. *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013. 304 p.

Recommended Resources:

Craigie, Peter. *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978.

Thiessen, Arden. *Keeping in Step with the God of Peace*. Steinbach, MB: Steinbach Bible College, 2008.

IV. SELECT ARTICLES

Hans Boersma, "Preferential Hospitality," in *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), pp. 75-95. (22 pages)

Pierre Gilbert, "The Function of Imprecation in Israel's Eighth-Century Prophets," *Direction* 35 (2006):44-58. (16)

<http://www.directionjournal.org/35/1/function-of-imprecation-in-israels.html>

_____. "Is God a God of War?" *Christian Leader* (January 2003):13-17. (5)

_____. "The Violence of God. Investigations in the Book of Isaiah. Part 1." *MB Herald*. Vol. 44 (September 2, 2005):12-13. (2)

<http://www.mbherald.com/44/12/violence.en.html>

_____. "The Violence of God. Investigations in the Book of Isaiah. Part 2." *MB Herald*. Vol. 44 (September 23, 2005):11-12. (2)

<http://www.mbherald.com/44/13/violence.en.html>

_____. "The Violence of God. Investigations in the Book of Isaiah. Part 3." *MB Herald*. Vol. 44 (October 14, 2005):10-11. (2)

<http://www.mbherald.com/44/14/violence.en.html>

_____. "The Violence of God. Investigations in the Book of Isaiah. Part 4." *MB Herald*. Vol. 44 (November 4, 2005):10-11. (2)

<http://www.mbherald.com/44/15/violence.en.html>

_____. "The Violence of God. Investigations in the Book of Isaiah. Part 5." *MB Herald*. Vol. 44 (November 25, 2005):11-12. (2)

<http://www.mbherald.com/44/16/violence.en.html>

_____. "The Violence of God. Investigations in the Book of Isaiah. Part 6." *MB Herald*. Vol. 44 (December 16, 2005):8-9. (2)

<http://www.mbherald.com/44/17/violence.en.html>

Clay Jones, "We Don't Hate Sin, so We Don't Understand What Happened to the Canaanites," *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009):53-71. (20)

Elmer Martens, "Toward Shalom: Absorbing the Violence," in *War in the Bible and Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Richard S. Hess and Elmer A. Martens (Eisenbrauns, 2008), pp. 33-57. (26)

Eric Seibert, "Evaluating Disturbing Divine Behavior by the God Jesus Reveals," in *Disturbing Divine Behavior* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), pp. 183-207. (26)

Walter Unger, "Christ Makes War." Unpublished paper presented at the Mennonite Brethren Study Conference, October 16, 2009. (13)

Christopher C. Wright, "What about the Canaanites?" in *The God I don't Understand*

(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), pp. 73-107. (36)

V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Attendance and Class Participation

*Students are expected to attend every class. Unjustified absences will be noted and will affect the percentage of the grade attributed to this item.

*Students are encouraged to ask questions and to initiate class discussions on relevant issues.

*Students will refrain from engaging in informal conversations with their neighbours, as such behaviour is disrespectful of the professor and the other students.

*Students should always come to class ready to answer questions on the readings and be prepared to participate in class discussions.

*Students will turn off their cell phones.

*Laptops will only be used for note taking.

*Students should make every effort to be punctual.

*Students will be graded on their attendance *and* their degree of participation in class.

B. Reading

Due Date: TBD

C. Book Reports

Due Date: TBD

D. Article Reports

Students will submit a short response to each article listed above.

-Length (150 words).

-Highlight what you consider to be the most significant concept with respect to the object of this course.

-Please submit all the reports in one single document.

Due Date: TBD

E. Critical Journal

Purpose

The object of this assignment is to provide an opportunity for students to systematically reflect on the course (lectures/class discussions and readings) in order to arrive at a some tentative conclusions with respect to the association between God/Jesus and violence. The journal should seek to explicitly integrate by use of footnotes the lectures, textbooks, the required articles, and any other relevant sources consulted during the course. This paper is intended to be a *critical* response in which students are expected to dialogue with the various resources encountered in the context of the course.

Structure

The journal will be divided into three sections:

a. Most major/significant concepts gleaned from the classes (lectures and discussions).

b. Most major/significant concepts gleaned from the readings.

c. Tentative conclusions.

Length

10-12 pages (3000-3600 words)

Presentation

Be sure to include the following elements:

Title page

Table of contents

Section headings

Bibliography

Be sure to provide the bibliographical references, as applicable, especially as it pertains to sections b and c.

Style

*Each section should contain a formal text narrative (not point form) with clearly delineated paragraphs.

*Chicago Style

Due Date: TBD

VI. TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. Preamble
2. Introductions
3. The Fundamental Problem
4. Importance of the Course
 - a. Theological Concerns
 - b. Pastoral Concerns
5. Summary
6. Some Questions

B. Method

1. Primary Focus: The Old Testament
2. Hermeneutical Issues
 - a. Preliminary Matters
 - b. The “Jesus Principle”
 - c. Inspiration and Authority of Scripture
 - d. Conclusion

C. The Concept of Peace in the Bible

1. Old Testament
2. New Testament

D. Violence in the Bible: A Survey of Approaches

E. The Genesis of Evil and Violence: A Fallen World

1. Rationale
2. Origin of Evil, Death, and Violence
3. An Examination of Genesis 2-3 and Romans 5

F. The War Motif in the Old Testament or Divine Violence in Perspective

1. Introduction
2. Cultural Background: The Gods of the Ancient Near East

3. Adam and Eve
4. Cain
5. The Flood (Gen 6-8)
6. The Exodus
7. The Sinai covenant
 - a. Justice in the Old Testament
 - b. The Curse Motif
8. Wars of Conquest
- G. The Problem of War in the Old Testament
- H. The War Motif in the New Testament
- I. Conclusions and Perspectives
- J. Some Inconvenient Questions

VI. HANDING IN ESSAYS

Unless otherwise instructed, students will submit written assignments by e-mail. Students are responsible for ensuring that assignments have in fact been received by the professor. If the student does not receive confirmation of receipt within 24 hours, the communication is deemed to have failed. The student must then take the initiative to contact the professor to confirm receipt of the submission. In case of disagreement in regards to an electronic submission, the professor's electronic reply will constitute the only proof of submission. Without such proof, the assignment will be deemed not to have been submitted and will be assigned a grade of 0 or F.

VII. MISCELLANEOUS

*All grades submitted by CMU's instructors are provisional until they have been vetted by the Dean's Council. That process occurs early in January for fall semester grades and early in May for winter semester grades.

*Please consult the *CMU Academic Calendar, Section II: Academic Policies* for further information about extensions and incompletes, multiple submissions of the same work, attendance policies, examination rescheduling, academic misconduct, appeals, and other academic matters. (Available at

http://www.cmu.ca/docs/academic/CMU_Academic_Calendar_SecII.pdf)

*Late research papers will be accepted up to five (5) week days after the due date provided the student submits a written note at least 2 days before the day the paper is due. The written note will include a formal request and a statement explaining why the delay is necessary. An extension will be granted only for clearly serious reasons. In this case, a late paper will not be penalized but the professor reserves the right not to annotate said paper. Only a grade will appear.

Longer extensions will be approved only for medical reasons or by permission from the registrar's office. Papers submitted beyond the 5-day grace period without adequate justification will be penalized by 5% per day past the deadline.

*CMU strives to provide a fair and supportive learning environment for academically qualified students with disabilities. The Accessibility Services office coordinates with the Academic Office to provide academic accommodations to eligible students. If you are eligible for these services or have questions about becoming eligible, please contact Sandra Loeppky, Coordinator of Accessibility Programs at sloeppky@cmu.ca or 204.487.3300.

VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY