

Methodist Theological School in Ohio
3081 Columbus Pike
Delaware, OH 43015

Preaching & Interpreting Wisdom Traditions (HM/HB 745)
Prerequisites: HB500 and a HB/NT 600

Instructor: Rev. Valerie Bridgeman, Ph.D.
Visiting Professor
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Office Hours by Appointment
(Best means of contact is email)

Term: Fall 2014

Dates and Times: Tuesdays, 8:30 am to 11:30 am

Location: G140/145

CONSULT YOUR SYLLABUS REGULARLY

SIGNIFICANT FIRST NOTE: *This syllabus is the first iteration of your course schedule for this fall. As with all written documents, it is subject to revision. Revision is a part of the human enterprise and indicates that I am not perfect, as none of us is. IF you receive a revised addition, immediately discard the first version OR, write, "invalid" on each page of the first one so that you will not be confused about the requirements for the course.*

Catalog Course Description

This course focuses on wisdom literature, with selected portions from Ecclesiastes, Job, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Wisdom psalms. Non-preaching students will do alternate public address of a publishable exegetical or hermeneutical essay with ample aid from the professor. Students will be exposed to liberationist forms of preaching, especially Womanist preaching strategies. 3 credit hours. Prerequisite: HM-600.

Course Goal

This course seeks to help students learn and engage interpretive and homiletical strategies for preaching from the Wisdom corpus of the bible. By the completion of this course, students should:

- Be familiar with the major themes of Job, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Wisdom Psalms
- Have a strategy for preaching Good News from Hebrew biblical texts that honors the rich tradition of observing life as a locus for God's activity in the world
- Learn to locate Hebrew Bible/Old Testament texts as sites for Good News beyond superseding them with New Testament/Christian scriptures
- Have an expanded set of resources for sermon development
- Be a more effective communicator of the Good News

NOTE: YOU ARE WELCOME TO GET THE KINDLE VERSION OF BOOKS

Required Textbooks

1. Brenner, Athalaya, ed. *Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*. T & T Clark Publishers, 1995.
2. Brown, William P. *Ecclesiastes: Interpretation: Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Westminster/John Knox, 2011.
3. Janzen, J. Gerald. *Job: Interpretation: Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Westminster/John Knox, 2012.
4. Introduction to Wisdom Literature. The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume 5. Abingdon Press, 1997.
5. The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha, 4th Edition.
6. Articles, chapters, and essays as provided

PROVERBS

- a. Akoto, Dorothy B E A. "The Book of Proverbs and Its Relationship to African-Ewe Proverbial Communication," in *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, 37 no 1-2 2011, p 35-56.
- b. Franklin, Naomi, "Proverbs," 244-248, in *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*, Hugh R. Page, Jr., gen. ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.
- c. Miles, Carol, "What's for Dinner? (Proverbs 15:17)," 42-46, in *Those Preaching Women: A Multicultural Collection*. Judson Press, 2008.

JOB

- d. Cox, Claude. "When Torah Embraced Wisdom and Song: Job 28: 28, Ecclesiastes 12: 13, and Psalm 1: 2." *Restoration Quarterly* 49.2 (2007): 65-74.
- e. Masenya, Madipoane (ngwan'a Mphahlele) and Rodney S. Sadler, Jr, "Job," 237-243, in *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*, Hugh R. Page, Jr., gen. ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.
- f. Newsom, Carol A. "The Book of Job," 317-637 (selected portions). *The New Interpreters Bible: Job, Psalms, and 1 & 2 Maccabees, Vol. IV (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996)*.
- g. Prideaux, Andrew. "The Yahweh Speeches in the Book of Job: Sublime Irrelevance, or Right to the Point?." *Reformed Theological Review, The* 69.2 (2010): 75-87.

ECCLESIASTES

- h. Hopkins, Jamal-Dominique, "Ecclesiastes," 260-265, in *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*, Hugh R. Page, Jr., gen. ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

SONG OF SONGS

- i. McCall, Robin C. "'Most Beautiful among Women': Feminist/Womanist Contributions to Reading the Song of Songs." *Review & Expositor* 105.3 (2008): 417-433.
- j. Weems, Renita J. "Song of Songs." *The Women's Bible Commentary, Expanded Edition, ed. CA Newsom and SH Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) (1992): 164-68.*

GENERAL INTERPRETATION

- k. Bridgeman Davis, Valerie, "Inclusive Language and Africana Worship," 145-150, in *Companion to the Africana Worship Book*, Valerie Bridgeman [Davis] and Safiyah Fosua, gen. eds. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007.
- l. Gafney, Wil, "Reading the Hebrew Bible Responsibly," 45-51, in *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*, Hugh R. Page, Jr., gen. ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

Recommended Reading Resources

1. Alter, Robert. *The Wisdom Books*. W. W. Norton & Co. (Reprint), 2011.
2. Bellis, Alice Ogden, "The Women in the Wisdom Literature and the Song of Songs," 170-182, in *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible (Second ed)*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2007.
3. Kynes, Will. "Beat Your Parodies into Swords, and Your Parodied Books into Spears: A New Paradigm for Parody in the Hebrew Bible." *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 19.3 (2011): 276-310.
4. Murphy, Roland E. *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002. 978-0802839657
5. Weems, Renita. *What Matters Most: Ten Lessons in Living Passionately from Song of Solomon*. Walk Worthy Press, 2004.

Grading and Student Evaluation

Attendance & Class Participation	20%
Theological Reflection on Preaching Wisdom Material	20%
Preaching Exercises or Hermeneutical/Interpretation Exercises*	40%
*(Concept sermons on each wisdom book)	
Final Sermon/Final Project	20%

NOTE: I am indebted to Dr. Greg Carey, New Testament Professor at Lancaster Seminary, for the section "Things You Can Do to Foster Your Success." Modified and used with his permission.

Things You Can Do to Foster Your Success

1. Remember that this is your theological education and take ownership of it. The Seminary and the instructor are here to guide and assist your learning, but ultimately your education is what you make of it with the help of the Holy Spirit. Take account of your education in your prayer life. Your instructors do.
2. Prepare for class. Do the assigned readings in preparation for each class session. When you cannot read everything, take a few minutes to scan through the readings. Identify the major topics and lines of argument. The assigned readings will prepare you to benefit from class discussions. Use the helps provided in the Syllabus to guide your reading. Take advantage of the study helps provided by Powell, both in the book and online. An active learner learns more than a passive learner does.
3. Take a few minutes after each class session to reflect. What were the major discussion points of this class session? Usually there are only a few – see if you can identify them. Perhaps discuss these points with a friend. Always ask: what is the big picture here?
4. Plan your writing before you write. Statistically speaking, students who finish assignments with time to spare do better than students who rush at the last minute. When you're preparing a short essay, be thinking about your topic during every class session. Organize your thoughts before you begin to write. Sketch out your ideas and line of thought before you write a single word. Make sure you are ready to provide credit to the sources from which you glean ideas and information.

Once you've completed a first draft, review it – and consider whether your work meets the criteria of assessment spelled out in the Syllabus.

5. Your success on written assignments is all about clarity, logic, and detail. This is a masters-level course, and it provides preparation for religious leadership: superficial engagement will not do. Make sure you engage the primary texts directly and specifically. Make sure you engage the assigned readings where they can be helpful. Make sure you provide a clear thesis (or claim) and a clear line of thought. Think about it from your instructor's point of view: if you could have written this same assignment without having taken this class, something is wrong.

6. On rare occasions it is necessary to ask for an extension of a particular assignment. Be aware that students tend to do much, much better when they stay on schedule.

COVENANT PRINCIPLES FOR SHARED LEARNING:

1. Attendance and active participation in class: I expect students to be in class by 6:30 p.m., prepared to fully participate by contributing to the conversation and discussing the readings, their responses, and questions that arise in this inquiry. **“Habitually coming in late conveys unintended disrespect to the community of co-creators and can be disruptive”** (Dr. Margaret Aymer, ITC, Womanist Biblical Interpretation syllabus). If students are late for the beginning of class or leave at break time, they will be considered absent for part of that class session. See the Student Handbook for the seminary's policy on absences from class. Students are responsible for any work missed when absent. I will not provide written copies of lectures/discussion sessions.
2. Style of pedagogy and class format: I do not lecture as much as lead discussions and small groups. I hope the creative components will fire your imagination. **This style requires that you have read and are ready to lead the discussion if called upon.** I am presuming shared responsibility as in any master's level course, just as in a seminar style. As such, students will help lead discussions; we will have debates; we will use media, etc.
3. Read all assigned materials. As a master's level students, I expect that each co-learner will help guide the discussion by his or her thoughtful, informed conversation. Pedagogues note that **for every hour in class, students should expect to study (read/reflect) three hours.** I have designed this course with the expectation that you will not be able to read “at the last minute” and that you will lean closer to that 9-hour study than not.
4. All papers must be typed, double-spaced, one-inch margins on all sides, and 12-point font (either Times New Roman, Arial, or Book Antiqua—no other font, please). No italics or bold fonts. Papers must be properly documented with its sources. The seminary's official document sourcing style is the Chicago Manual Style (MLA). Please get the latest addition, 15th edition, or use the online version (for a fee). Proofread your work. **Please do not put papers in folders or any container. Simply staple them together.**
5. Please turn off cell phones. If you are on call or need to be “wired” because of children or other necessary connections, please be sure that your cell is on vibration/silent and leave the room to answer any calls.
6. You may use computers in my classroom but please limit Internet surfing, etc. Use the computer for the class itself.
7. As a part of our time together, I expect students to use respectful, inclusive/expansive language regarding the deity and humans. Contrary to what people have been told, this statement does not mean that you may never say “father god,” but it does mean that you are challenged to stretch further in your metaphoric language. It DOES mean you may not use “man” as a “generic term,” or “mankind” when you intend to include all people. There are plenty of alternative words. “The language we use represents who we are and for what we stand as theologians and ministers” (Yee,

syllabus). The following statement, “The Language of Community,” is the statement given for this course when taught by a former colleague, Dr. Steven Parrish. I could not have said it better.

From its opening chapter, the bible affirms the worth of community. Both male and female in the human community bear the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). The bible values children as a part of human community (Exodus 12:26; Deut. 6:20; Luke 9:46-48). The oppressed are given special consideration by the Bible; e.g., strangers, orphans, and widow are important people in God’s community (Deut. 24:17, 19, 21). Further, Jonah discovered that even those he regarded as enemies are cherished by God and are important individuals in the world community. The faith of the Bible is an inclusive faith.

Further, the biblical language about God is also far more expansive and inclusive than we have often recognized. Exodus 3 maintains that God is essentially unnamable and free to remain who God wants to be. First Samuel 4-6 and 2 Samuel 6 testify to God’s unwillingness to be “boxed in” by human formulations of what God “ought” to be. The metaphorical language of the bible is diverse indeed, describing God by images that range from the battlefield (e.g., Psalm 18, 24) to images that depict God as the one who gives birth to the mountains Psalm 90:2 and the ice (Job 38:29). One of the aims of this course is to grow in the ways we think and speak of one another and of God.

ASSIGNMENTS

20% Attendance: Students who arrive to class on time for each meeting, refrain from taking unexcused absences, demonstrate evidence of reading assigned material, and contribute to the class discussion will have no problem receiving the total 20% available for this portion of the grade. Students who are habitually tardy will see an automatic drop in their letter grade. Students with 2 or more unexcused absences will automatically drop a letter grade. In short, be in class on time each week prepared to contribute and you will do very well in this course.

20% Theological Reflection on Preaching Wisdom Material:

Students will write a 5-7 page reflection that demonstrates how their understanding of the Wisdom literature as source for Christian preaching and theology has grown, changed, and/or been challenged. This paper takes into account readings (and should be duly footnoted), class discussions (also noted), and the implications for the students’ reflections going forward. Ample examples from biblical texts should be used to help illuminate the students’ point.

Preaching Concept Exercises or Hermeneutical/Interpretation Exercise – 40%

Each preaching student will participate in the in-class work on concept preaching and then present the following week (more information will be provided). Each Hebrew Bible course student will also work on a concept “white paper” (comes to about 2 pages) and present their findings the next week. These papers may be resourced by the class sources; students are welcome to use other scholarly sources. There are 4 (**FOUR**) for the semester and they are weighted equally.

Final Sermon (HM registrants)

Each student will preach a final sermon. The topic for the final sermon will be left to each student to decide, however the professor must approve it. The sermon:

- Will be 12 to 15 minutes in length

- May be delivered with or without a manuscript, but a manuscript must be presented to the professor before preaching the sermon (if you preach using your manuscript, bring an extra copy for yourself)
- The manuscript should contain a cover page
- Should demonstrate growth in the student from initial preaching exercise
- The deadline for having your text, theme, and title approved is **NOVEMBER 11**

Final Article Presentation (HB registrants)

- Will be 12 to 15 minutes in length (which is 10-12 pages)
- May use media as creatively as possible
- May create artistic expression within the realm of discussing research findings (e.g., songs, poems, engaging other students as actors, etc.)
- The manuscript should contain a cover page (and may be presented electronically)
- Should demonstrate a high level of academic research and findings with implications for 21st century society and religious communities
- Deadline for topic and initial bibliography (at least 7 scholarly books, essays, or articles, annotated) is **NOVEMBER 11**

Grade	4.0 Scale		100% Scale	
	Lower limit	Upper limit	Lower limit	Upper limit
A plus	4.0	4.0	97	100
A	3.8	4.0	93	96
A minus	3.4	3.7	90	92
B plus	3.1	3.3	87	89
B	2.8	3.0	83	86
B minus	2.4	2.7	80	82
C plus	2.1	2.3	77	79
C	1.8	2.0	73	76
C minus	1.4	1.7	70	72
D plus	1.1	1.3	67	69
D	0.8	1.0	63	66
F	0.0	0.7	0	62

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1: August 26 (Introduction to the Course)

- **READING TO HAVE COMPLETED BY FIRST CLASS MEETING (less than 20 pages together):** Bridgeman (Inclusive Language) and Gafney (Reading Responsibly), both on Sakai
- Introductions
- Syllabus Overview

ASSIGNMENT FOR WEEK 2:

- 1. READ ALL of the Book of Proverbs; READ from Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature (FCWL): Fontaine, 24-49**
- 2. READ Franklin (Africana Bible): 244-248; Akoto (online): 35-56**
- 3. USE NIB 19-264, Van Leeuwen as Commentary**

WEEK 2: September 2 (Proverbs)

- Discuss readings
- Re-write 5 proverbs; share common sayings from current time
- Write introductory sentence to a sermon on a Proverb (in class)

ASSIGNMENT FOR WEEK 3: (heavier reading week)

- 1. READ ALL of Proverbs (again)**
- 2. READ ALL of Part II in FCWL (57 pages); Read Shulemit Valler in FCWL, 85-99**
- 3. READ Miles' sermon in Preaching Women (on SaKai), 42-46**
- 4. Make notes on 5 themes in the collection of Proverbs and bring to class**
- 5. USE NIB 19-264, Van Leeuwen as Commentary**
- 6. Write 5-minute concept sermon to be presented in class on September 9**

WEEK 3: September 9 (Proverbs)

- Concept sermons preached
- Debate on Strange and Wise Woman (please read carefully as you will take sides)
- Mapping Proverbs: key ideas, phrases, characters, concerns, dissonance, etc.
- Watch sermon on a Proverbs on line; analyze
- **ASSIGNMENT FOR WEEK 4:**
 - 1. READ ALL of Proverbs (again)**
 - 2. Make notes on 5 themes in the collection of Proverbs and bring to class**
 - 3. USE NIB 19-264, Van Leeuwen as Commentary**

WEEK 4: September 16 (Proverbs)

- Work on sermon goals and outlines for sermon on Proverbs (NOTE: students may choose NOT to preach on Proverbs, but this exercise is designed to help us think about connections from these ancient texts to today)
- In-class playwriting on a Proverb (no prior skills necessary)

ASSIGNMENT FOR WEEK 5:

- 1. READ ALL of Job**
- 2. READ Janzen, on first 20 chapters**
- 3. Make notes on 5 themes in Job (the first 20 chapters) and bring to class**
- 4. USE Newsom in New Interpreter's Bible Volume IV as commentary**

WEEK 5: September 23 (Job)

- Discuss readings, paying close attention to actions, dialogue and theological concepts within the dialogue of Job
- In class: work on concept sermon prompts

ASSIGNMENT WEEK 6:

- 1. READ ALL of Job (again); pay CLOSE ATTENTION to the arguments of his friends and to Job's arguments/laments**
- 2. READ Janzen, on chapters 21-42**
- 3. READ Prideaux (on Sakai)**
- 4. Make notes on 5 themes in Job (chapters 21-42) and bring to class**
- 5. USE Newsom in New Interpreter's Bible Volume IV as commentary**

WEEK 6: September 30 (Job)

- Debate (take the side of one of Job's friends)
- Write scene from Job and friends OR Job and God
- In-class group work on sermon parts
- Review from earlier reading; conversation on preaching from Wisdom traditions

ASSIGNMENT WEEK 7:

- 1. READ ALL of Job (again); pay CLOSE ATTENTION to the arguments of his friends and to Job's arguments/laments**
- 2. READ Masenya and Sadler in *Africana Bible*, 237-243**
- 3. USE Newsom in New Interpreter's Bible Volume IV as commentary**

WEEK 7: October 7 (Job)

- In-class group work—work on concept sermon on Job
- Read/perform scene from Job from prior week
- Watch sermon (as time permits)

ASSIGNMENT FOR WEEK 8:

- 1. READ all of Ecclesiastes**
- 2. READ Hopkins in *Africana Bible***
- 3. READ all of Brown's commentary on Ecclesiastes**

MID-TERM RECESS: OCTOBER 14

WEEK 8: October 21 (Ecclesiastes)

- Discuss Readings on Ecclesiastes
- Choose Texts to compare/contrast (provided by instructor); in-class work
- Consider the role of God in Ecclesiastes
- Work on concept sermon for Ecclesiastes

ASSIGNMENT FOR WEEK 9:

- 4. READ all of Ecclesiastes**
- 5. Revisit Brown's commentary on Ecclesiastes**

WEEK 9: October 28 (Ecclesiastes)

- Discuss ethical dimensions of Ecclesiastes for preaching

ASSIGNMENT FOR WEEK 10:

Ecclesiastes short/concept due November 4

Read all of Song of Songs

McCall, Robin C. "“Most Beautiful among Women”: Feminist/Womanist Contributions to Reading the Song of Songs." *Review & Expositor* 105.3 (2008): 417-433.

Weems, Renita J. "Song of Songs." *The Women’s Bible Commentary, Expanded Edition, ed. CA Newsom and SH Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) (1992): 164-68.*

Read the Song of Songs section in Introduction to Wisdom Literature. The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume 5. Abingdon Press, 1997

WEEK 10: November 4 (Song of Songs)

Discuss Ecclesiastes concept of humanity, of work, of pleasure, and of God (LOOK for these ideas in your reading)

In-class work

ASSIGNMENT FOR WEEK 11:

Sermon text/research article topic due November 11

WEEK 11: November 11 (Song of Songs)

Classroom reading of Song of Songs

In-class time to work on preaching and research skills

ASSIGNMENT FOR WEEK 12:

Song of Songs short due November 18

WEEK 12: November 18 (Sermons and/or Presentations w/discussions following)

ASSIGNMENT FOR WEEK 13:

Final Sermons and Research Articles are due December 2 (ALL DUE even though we most likely will not complete them)

THANKSGIVING BREAK: NOVEMBER 25

WEEK 13: December 2 (Sermons and/or Presentations w/discussions following)

ASSIGNMENT FOR WEEK 14: Sermons and Final Theological Reflection is due December 9

WEEK 14: December 9 (Last meeting)

- Sermons and Final Thoughts; discussion on preaching the Wisdom Literature; a theology of wisdom for preaching

Please see Student Handbook for sections providing policy details on the following:

ADA—MTSO seeks to remove barriers to inclusion in its learning communities. Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs at the beginning of the semester. Please contact the Director of Student Services to coordinate reasonable accommodations for

students with documented disabilities. Any accommodation must be agreed upon prior to the due date of the affected course requirement.

Class attendance—Regular attendance is expected in all classes. During unavoidable absences, students are responsible for missed work. An excessive number of absences may result in grade reduction or course failure, despite successful completion of all assigned work. In most cases, a student will not be allowed credit for a course if he or she is absent for 25% of the class sessions.

Electronic Devices—Turn mobile devices off or “vibrate only” during class. Browsing the Internet or engaging in email or social network conversations during class is discouraged. Instructors have the right to impose grading penalties for disruptions due to electronic devices.

Human Subjects Research—Research by MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel that collects non-public information from and/or about living individuals or contemporary organizations/groups for purposes of publication or public presentation (including class assignments) must be approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee. MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel should err on the side of caution and apply for committee approval of any activity that may fit this description.

Inclusive Language—In accordance with MTSO’s policy on inclusive language, all students are expected to use gender inclusive or gender neutral language in their writing and in the classroom discussions when referring to human beings.

Incompletes—To receive a course grade of Incomplete, students must submit the petition form from the Registrar with all signatures to the Dean’s Office before the last day of regularly scheduled classes. See Student Handbook for intensive term deadlines. Any petition submitted without a due date for outstanding work will be denied. If work is not complete by the due date the Registrar will record the grade of F for the course.

Pass/Fail—The decision to exercise this option must be made before the end of the second week of the course by completing the appropriate form available through the Registrar. To receive a grade of “pass” the student must do at least the equivalent of C minus work in the course.

Plagiarism—Plagiarism is a serious matter of academic, professional, and personal integrity. All students at the masters’ level are expected to understand the requirement to provide attribution when the work of others is used. Students are also expected to be familiar with and understand the school’s policy on Academic Misconduct found in the Student Handbook. If a student has questions about attribution, citation, and how to avoid plagiarism they should consult the course instructor, the school’s writing instructor, or library staff. When in doubt it is better to provide attribution even if one is uncertain about the proper citation form. Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct that results in disciplinary actions per the Student Handbook that may range from failing an assignment or course to expulsion.