

Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology

Wisdom Literature — OT-2600

Fall 2019

Monday / Thursday, 11:10am—12:30pm

DSPT Room 2

Prof. Matthew J. Thomas

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Office hours: Tuesday / Thursday 12:30–1:30, and by appointment

Course description

This class presents students with an introduction to the Wisdom writings of the Hebrew Scriptures. It seeks to understand how these writings were first received as God's revealed wisdom within their original Hebrew contexts; how the fullness of their wisdom is seen in light of Christ, the incarnate Wisdom of God; and how they can shape us to become living expressions of God's wisdom today. The course employs a lecture / discussion format, and evaluates student progress with exams (midterm and final, 25% each), a research assignment and presentation (35%), and discussion participation (15%). This class is for MDiv and MA/MTS students, with OT Introduction or equivalent as a prerequisite.

Required Textbooks

Roland E. Murphy. *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*. 3rd edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 2002. \$15.80. ISBN: 978-0802839657.

Brant Pitre and John Bergsma. *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible: The Old Testament*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2018. \$34.00. ISBN: 978-1586177225.

Optional Textbooks

Michael Gorman. *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (Revised and expanded edition). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010. \$17.85. ISBN: 978-0801046407.

James L. Crenshaw. *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*. 3rd edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox. 2010. \$21.62. ISBN: 978-0664234591.

C.S. Lewis. *Reflections on the Psalms*. San Francisco: HarperCollins. 2017. \$11.33. ISBN: 978-0062565488. NB: This book is also available open-source online.

Kate L. Turabian. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (9th edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. \$15.47. ISBN: 978-0060936990.

Student Learning Goals

In this course, students will:

- Be introduced to the history of wisdom literature in the context of the ancient Near East, as well as in the context of the history of Israel.
- Attain an overview of the Wisdom books of the Bible, focusing on the provenance of each text, the role they performed in the daily life and worship of Israel, and the content and significance of their message.

- Become familiar with the history of Christian interpretation of Israel's wisdom literature in light of Christ, the wisdom of God made flesh, beginning in the New Testament and continuing in the early Christian writings.
- Learn to exegete significant texts from the various wisdom texts with a view towards effective preaching.

Student Learning Outcomes

A student who completes this course will be able to:

- Explain the overall history of Jewish wisdom literature in the context of the history of the ancient Near East and Israel.
- Describe leading ideas regarding the provenance and composition of Israel's wisdom texts.
- Convey the significance of each wisdom book as God's word within the context of ancient Israel.
- Relate how these wisdom texts serve as Christian scripture in the light of Christ's advent.
- Analyze and exegete wisdom literature.

Methodology

Class meetings will consist of lectures, class discussions, and student presentations. Out-of-class assignments will include reading and studying, writing a major paper, and studying for the midterm and final.

Course Requirements

Class attendance is mandatory. Students must be punctual and prepared for each class by having studied the reading and completed any other assignments. Class participation in answering questions and contributing appropriately to discussions is important, and students should be prepared to be called on, even when they have not raised their hand.

In lieu of reading quizzes, students will be asked to take notes on their assigned readings for each class period. During each class period, a student will be called upon to share their impressions for each assigned reading to begin our discussion. Students are strongly advised to be vigilant in completing their readings, as they know neither the day nor the hour when they will be called upon.

Each student will write a *Sed Contra* paper of approximately 4 single-spaced pages (around 2000 words) on a disputed question in wisdom literature that is agreed upon with the professor. The format of the paper is outlined at the end of the syllabus (see "Major paper: *Sed Contra*"). Papers are to be carefully proofread, and failure to follow the given format will result in being required to rewrite the paper with a penalty of one letter grade. Final papers will be due at the end of the course.

Related to this assignment, students will give a 10-15 minute presentation of their *Sed Contra* papers, followed by 5-10 minutes of responding to questions from the class. This will give the class an opportunity to explore the significance of the question and test the presenter's arguments, and allow the presenter to further refine their work for the final version of the paper (which will be turned in at the conclusion of the course).

The midterm and the final will be approximately 45 minutes each. The midterm will be on the wisdom literature covered to this point in class (i.e. through Sirach). The final exam will cover the writings after Sirach. Exams are open-Bible, but no notes are allowed.

Grading Procedures and Rubric

Discussion participation: 15%

Midterm: 25%

Final: 25%

Sed Contra paper: 25%

Presentation: 10%

- A Excellent work; student demonstrates excellent understanding of the material.
- B Very good work; student demonstrates strong understanding of the material.
- C Fair work; student demonstrates adequate understanding of the material, though with room for improvement.
- D Poor work; student demonstrates some barely adequate understanding of the material, with substantial room for improvement.
- F Student demonstrates inadequate understanding of the material.

Grade scale

A	100 – 95	B-	82 – 80	D+	69 – 66
A-	94 – 90	C+	79 – 76	D	65 – 63
B+	89 – 86	C	75 – 73	D-	62 – 60
B	85 – 83	C-	72 – 70	F	59 and below

Course Schedule

Week 1 (September 2, 5)

Class: **No class – Labor day**

HW:

Class: Course introduction, syllabus, introduction to Murphy & Pitre-Bergsma

HW: Read Murphy 1 (“Introduction”); Pitre-Bergsma 22 (“The Place of Wisdom”)

Week 2 (September 9, 12)

Class: Wisdom within the Christian Tradition

HW: Read Proverbs 1–15; Murphy 2 (“Proverbs—The Wisdom of Words”)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Proverbs 1–15

HW: Read Proverbs 15–31; Pitre-Bergsma 25 (“Proverbs”)

Week 3 (September 16, 19)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Proverbs 15–31

HW: Read Job 1–14; Murphy 3 (“Job the Steadfast”)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Job 1–14

HW: Read Job 14–31; Pitre-Bergsma 23 (“Job”)

Week 4 (September 23, 26)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Job 14—31
HW: Read Job 32—42

Class: Lecture / discussion on Job 32—42
HW: Read Ecclesiastes 1—6; Murphy 4 (“Qoheleth the Skeptic?”)

Week 5 (September 30, October 3)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Ecclesiastes 1—6
HW: Read Ecclesiastes 7—12; Pitre-Bergsma 26 (“Ecclesiastes”)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Ecclesiastes 7—12
HW: Read Sirach 1—23; Murphy 5 (“Ben Sira—Wisdom’s Traditionalist”)

Week 6 (October 7, 10)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Sirach 1—23
HW: Read Sirach 24—43; Pitre-Bergsma 29 (“Sirach”)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Sirach 24—43
HW: Read Sirach 44—51

Week 7 (October 14, 17)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Sirach 44—51
HW: Study for midterm

Class: **Midterm**

HW: Read Wisdom of Solomon 1—9; Murphy 6 (“Solomon—A View from the Diaspora”)

Week 8 (October 21, 24) **READING WEEK**

Week 9 (October 28, 31)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Wisdom of Solomon 1—9
HW: Read Wisdom of Solomon 10—19; Pitre-Bergsma 28 (“The Wisdom of Solomon”)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Wisdom of Solomon 10—19
HW: Read Song of Songs 1—4; Pitre-Bergsma 27 (“The Song of Solomon”)

Week 10 (November 4, 7)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Song of Songs 1—4
HW: Read Song of Songs 4—8; Murphy 7 (“Wisdom’s Echoes”)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Song of Songs 4—8
HW: Read Pitre-Bergsma 24 (“Psalms”); Athanasius, “Letter to Marcellinus”

Week 11 (November 11, 14)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Psalms (introduction), Athanasius' "Letter to Marcellinus"
HW: Read Psalms Book 1 (1—41)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Psalms Book 1 (1—41)
HW: Read Psalms Book 2 (42—72)

Week 12 (November 18, 21)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Psalms Book 2 (42—72)
HW: Read Psalms Book 3 (73—89)

Class: **No class – SBL**
HW:

Week 13 (November 25, 28)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Psalms Book 3 (73—89)
HW: Read Psalms Book 4 (90—106)

Class: **No class – Thanksgiving**
HW:

Week 14 (December 2, 5)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Psalms Book 4 (90—106)
HW: Read Psalms Book 5 (107—150)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Psalms Book 5 (107—150)
HW: Read Lewis, "A Word About Praising"

Week 15 (December 9, 12)

Class: Lecture / discussion on Lewis, "A Word About Praising"
HW: Study for final

Class: Christ, the Wisdom of God; **Final**
HW:

Major paper: *Sed Contra*

The *Sed contra* assignment is an opportunity for students to develop and employ their exegetical, research, and theological reasoning skills. In this assignment, students will seek to answer a disputed question in biblical studies (of their own choice) following the general structure of a Summa article. The purpose of this exercise is for students to closely examine and reflect upon the text(s) in question, and to engage critically with both traditional and modern interpretation in the selected area.

(NB: While this assignment adopts the structure of a Summa article, the purpose is not to reproduce an article in philosophy or systematics, but to use St. Thomas' methodology as a tool for critically engaging with a particular question in biblical studies. Thus, while logic should not be neglected, priority should be given to historical and textual considerations in formulating your answer and responding to objections.)

The five parts of the assignment's structure are as follows:

- **Question** (*Quaestio*): The question you will be answering -- i.e., "Whether Barney the dinosaur is a product of the jurassic period," etc. Students will get approval on their question from the professor before beginning research.
- **Objections** (*Videtur quod*): Concise presentations of the strongest arguments against your own position. Each should be distilled to a few sentences, and three to five objections total should be included.
- **On the contrary** (*Sed contra*): A brief, punchy statement of your own position; generally one to three sentences.
- **Answer** (*Respondeo quod*): A presentation of the argument and evidence for your own position. The arguments may be enumerated, and the response should be well-structured and carefully reasoned. This is the largest single section, and should comprise two to three paragraphs.
- **Replies to objections** (*Ad... dicendum quod*): A response to each of the prior objections, each of which should generally comprise one to three sentences (though additional space may be used if necessary).

Assignments will be evaluated along the following criteria:

- **How relevant is the question?** An excellent article will be on a disputed question, with some significance beyond the immediate field of study (rather than one that is not actually disputed by anyone, and/or largely irrelevant).
- **How strong are the objections?** An excellent article will identify the strongest arguments for the opposing side of the question, and state them in a manner that is precise and compelling, showing that the student has mastered the counter-evidence and listened well to both sides of the question. NB: Your own argument will only be as strong as the opposing evidence you admit from the other side!
- **How compelling is the positive statement?** An excellent article will be able to provide a well-structured, well-reasoned, and persuasive statement of their own position on the question. This will take the form of the initial statement (*Sed contra*) and the arguments for this position (*Respondeo*). Thorough research and engagement with relevant Scripture / commentaries and academic sources / theologians is key here.
- **How well are the objections answered?** An excellent article will provide compelling responses to each objection, showing how their weight can be allayed by other means.
- **How well does the presenter answer questions?** Students will present their articles to the class and answer follow-up questions; an excellent presentation will show mastery of the material in their responses.