Introduction to the Old Testament (online)  
RLGR-6010-R02  
Spring 2016 (Online Session B; March 15 – May 10, 2016)  
Dr. Giovanna R. CZANDER  
gczander@fordham.edu

“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and return not thither but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater;  
so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty.”  
(Isaiah, 55:10-11)

Course Description

The course introduces students to the academic study of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible taking a two-pronged approach: a personal and communal engagement with biblical texts and methodological awareness. Students will learn to explore the Old Testament as ‘Scripture’ while also learning to appreciate its role and value as personal and communal document, important for religious understanding and spiritual growth.

Learning Outcomes

1) Students will demonstrate facility with methods of research in the study of Old Testament.
2) Students will articulate the relationship between Old Testament theology and their professional practice and spiritual development.
3) Students will demonstrate an ability to critically read and analyze Old Testament texts and identify their styles, genres, terminology, contents, historical, literary, and canonical settings.
4) Students will demonstrate an ability to identify major theological themes in the Old Testament and to recognize the complexity of such themes in the texts.
5) Students will demonstrate an ability to relate the historical, theological and spiritual knowledge found in the study of the Old Testament to their own ministerial and spiritual life.

What is expected

Students are invited to approach the Old Testament with receptivity, respect, and curiosity and to be ready to be surprised by what they will find in the texts and about themselves as readers. Students are expected to read the assigned primary texts and the secondary literature and to participate in the discussions. Our discussions on Blackboard (which will be graded) are open also to all kinds of questions, as we recognize that questions are what prompt us to go beyond what we know and seek what we don’t know. Interacting on Blackboard aims also at promoting a communal and dynamic approach to the Old Testament texts. In addition to discussions, each module requires written activities. A final exegesis paper is due within two weeks after the end of the course. Detailed guidelines are available on Blackboard.

Course Outline

The course is divided in four modules (each including two parts and lasting two weeks) as follows:

MODULE 1: GOD OF CREATION, GOD OF HISTORY
Part I is an introduction to the study of the Old Testament, which includes an overview of the history and geography of ancient Israel, of the process of writing biblical texts. Method: Textual criticism.
Part II is devoted to the study of the book of Genesis, which includes the creation stories and the narratives about the patriarchs and matriarchs. Method: Source criticism.

MODULE 2: GOD OF SALVATION AND COVENANT
Part I of this module deals with the story of Exodus, both as narrative and as paradigm. Methods: Literary criticism and Inner-biblical exegesis.
Part II is devoted to the study of the covenant and its significance and to exploring biblical law.
MODULE 3:
SPEAKING FOR GOD: THE PROPHETS
Part I of the module introduces the phenomenon of prophetism and the role of prophets in the ancient world, in ancient Israel, and in the history of Israel. Forms of prophetic narratives and speech will be introduced. Method: Form criticism.
Part II focuses on some of the major prophets and themes in the prophetic books.

MODULE 4:
QUESTIONING GOD, UNDERSTANDING LIFE
Part I is devoted to the study of Wisdom literature, theodicy and the reflection on human life.
Part II focuses on Apocalyptic literature and suggests some conclusions on the Old Testament as a whole.

Procedure

Once you log in into blackboard, in the “Learning Space”, you will find the description of all the things to be done in each of the modules. In the “Discussion Board”, you will be able to do your postings; just click on “Discussion Board”, then click on the specific module you want to work on (e.g. “Introduction”, Module 1”), and then click on “Thread” when you are ready to do your posting. In order to reply to the work posted by one of the students, click first on that specific posting made by the student, and then click “Reply”. When you have clicked on “Thread” or “Reply”, you will be given the option to write or paste directly your text in a window, or to do an attachment. I suggest avoiding the use of “attachments” since some of the students do not have the software required to read some of the attachments (e.g. file.docx, file.rtf, etc.).

IMPORTANT: At the beginning of the course, you will be invited to introduce yourself to the rest of the class. After logging onto Blackboard, please go to “Introductions”, read the description for that module, and then post your personal introduction using the “Thread” option. This has to be done before or during the first day of the course: March 15, 2016. The Blackboard page will be available starting March 8, 2016 (“Week Zero”). You are invited to visit the page and make sure all the technology is in good working order.

Pace

For those students who are taking an online course for the first time, I would like to say that this course is reading and writing intense. The best way to keep up with the fast pace of the course is to check Blackboard once a day or every other day and to do some work each day. One cannot speed-read the Bible. Of course, the more you put into the class, the more you will be rewarded with a new understanding and appreciation for the OT. Going online once a week and trying to do it all will not help you absorb the material and interact with the other students.
Grade

Each assignment, including discussion posts, will be given a maximum of 100 points. 70% of the final grade is the average of the points obtained each week. The final paper is worth 30% of the final grade. The letter grades assigned correspond (roughly) to the following numerical equivalents:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Numerical Equivalent</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82.9%</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>73-76.9%</td>
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<td>F</td>
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Readings


Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is a serious violation of academic integrity (see Student Handbook.) Should any assignment be even partially plagiarized, the grade will be zero for the assignment and the plagiarizer reported to the Dean.