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HB6/714 Social World of Ancient Israel: Critical Contexts

This advanced seminar will be grounded in a sociological study of ancient Israel as a basis for critical applications/appropriation of social world topics in contemporary contexts. Social scientific models have been used in biblical studies to describe, analyze and contextualize social realities such as: social groups (e.g., family, clan, tribe, elite classes); cultural relationships (e.g., honor/shame, marriage, debt servitude); patterns of behavior (e.g., sacrifice, prophecy, gender); political structures (e.g., monarchy, empire); political, economic and social change (e.g., emergence of states, changes in social stratification); historical eras (e.g., early Israel, Judah under Persian rule); and socially constructed realities (e.g., ethnicity, gender, language and rhetoric, symbolism). When practiced with post-modern and ideological criticisms, social scientific criticism also identifies the social context of the interpreter and the construction and use of models and interpretation of data in contemporary contexts and issues.

The first part of the course will cover methods and topics in the sociology of ancient Israel, reading in the literature of social scientific criticism in the last three decades in Hebrew Bible studies. We will study the impact of social scientific methods on Biblical research and interpretation, including perspectives that emerged in biblical studies across disciplines with literary, feminist, ideological, liberation theology, and global hermeneutical approaches. We will consider heuristic models for appropriating and critiquing insights from the study of ancient social worlds in contemporary applications. In the second half of the course, each student will present a seminar paper that researches one of the topics of the social world of the HB, uses a hermeneutic for appropriation of ancient data, and suggests connections to a contemporary social issue. Contemporary issues for student research focus can include gender, feminism, land, ecology, stratification, cities, community, empire and resistance, etc.

Pre-requisites: HB500(100) and HB600(105).

Competencies:

In completing this course a student will

- Articulate an understanding of the social world and social constructions of ancient Israel
- Review and evaluate a bibliographic resources from social-scientific approaches to the Hebrew Bible
- Locate and describe one topic within the social world of ancient Israel in depth
- Use a hermeneutic for the critique and application of social world data and constructs for contemporary social issues
- Suggest an integration of a critically located topic from the social world of ancient Israel and a contemporary issue of social concern

Format:

The first section of the course will consist of lecture and discussion on topics of social scientific studies in Hebrew Bible research. The second section of the course will be seminar presentations

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by students on research topic of their choice in consultation with the professor. [Students will work in pairs or teams if class size warrants this.]

Expectations of the Student

- Attendance, preparation for, and participation in all class sessions, according to VST policies
- As assigned, prepare summaries of readings for class discussion
- Presentation of a seminar report on chosen topic, length 1.5 hours
- Major research paper on chosen topic, length 3750-5000 words, 15-20 pages

Required Reading:

Carter, Charles E. and Meyers, Carol L. (eds.) *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996. [=Carter]

McNutt, Paula. *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*. Library of Ancient Israel. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999. [=McNutt]

Reserves

Berger, Peter L. and Luckmann, Thomas. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Garden City: Doubleday & Co, 1966; Anchor Books, 1989.

Berquist, Jon L. *Controlling Corporeality: The Body and the Household in Ancient Israel*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. "The Family in First Temple Israel." Pages 48-103 in *Families in Ancient Israel*. Edited by Leo G Perdue, et al. The Family, Religion and Culture Series. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.

Chase-Dunn, Christopher and Thomas D. Hall. "Conceptualizing Core/Periphery Hierarchies for Comparative Study." Pages 5-44 in *Core/Periphery Relations in Precapitalist Worlds*. Edited by Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991.

Eisenstadt, S.N. "Observations and Queries about Sociological Aspects of Imperialism in the Ancient World." Pages 21-33 in 103 in *Power and Propaganda, A Symposium on Ancient Empires*. Edited by Mogens Trolle Larsen. Mesopotamia: Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology 7. Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979.

Esler, Philip F. *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006. [=Esler]

Gane, Roy. "The Role of Assyria in the Ancient Near East During the Reign of Manasseh," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 35 (1997).

Gottwald, Norman K. *The Tribes of Yahweh*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985.

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Meyers, Carol. "Material Remains and Social Relations: Women's Culture in Agrarian Household of the Iron Age." Pages 425-444 in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina*. Edited by William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003.

Parpola, Simo. "Assyria's Expansion in the 8th and 7th Centuries and Its Long-Term Repercussions in the West." Pages 99-111 in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina*. Edited by William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003.

Stager, Lawrence E. "The Archeology of the Family in Ancient Israel." *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1-35.

Yee, Gale A. *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

Assignments

1. As assigned, prepare a summary of readings for class discussion:
 - a. Summarize the methodology of the author, specifying how they use sociological methods and other methods
 - b. Summarize the main argument of the author
 - c. Evaluate their argument critically in light of other readings prepared on the topic
 - d. Suggest at least one way this reading might be applicable in contemporary critical contexts'
 - e. Prepare and hand out an annotation of the reading
2. Meet at least once individually with professor to select and focus seminar topic and discuss bibliographic sources.
3. Prepare and lead a seminar presentation on your selected topic. Hand out assigned readings for presentation at least one week before class. Present a 50 minute lecture on the topic and lead class discussion of the topic for 30 minutes. You may structure small group exercises if you wish, within the time allowed. Prepare and hand out annotations of sources used for presentation to other students.
4. Major research paper on chosen topic, length 3750-5000 words, 15-20 pages. Paper will show knowledge of one aspect of the social world of ancient Israel, an articulated hermeneutic that allows a critical appropriation of that aspect, and a description of a contemporary application.