

SEMESTER II

Religion 320

Interpreting Texts: Genesis

Professor Maggie Odell

Monday, Wednesday, Friday (11:50-12:45)

Spring 2018



The Book of Genesis is arguably the best known book in the Bible and the most influential. Not only does it lay the foundation for Jewish and Christian reflection on creation and human nature, sin and evil, and divine promise and blessing, it continues to exert a powerful hold on the secular imagination, as indicated by the recent film “Noah.” Yet it is also puzzling to modern readers: Why does the god who made the heavens and earth choose to bless only a single family? And for that matter, how did traditions about Abraham, a man so faithful he was willing to sacrifice his son, and Jacob, a deceiver who cheated his brother out of their father’s blessing, come to be included in the same book? As important as Genesis is, these puzzles have always pushed its readers to probe it more deeply—in other words, to engage in the task of interpretation.

This course uses the book of Genesis as a springboard for examining current approaches to the interpretation of sacred texts. First, we will examine its formation, tracing the development of originally oral traditions into a complex epic of Israelite origins. This examination will help us understand its inherent tensions. Second, we will examine its influence. How have such themes and motifs as the image of God, the rebellion in the garden, the destruction of Sodom, and the binding of Isaac continued to influence Jewish and Christian thought? Finally, we will examine postmodern approaches to the interpretation of Genesis, paying particular attention to questions of gender and sexuality, race, and the environment.

Assignments will include reading, practice in biblical interpretation and library research through several small written assignments and a final research paper.

SEMESTER II

Religion 395: Ethics Seminar

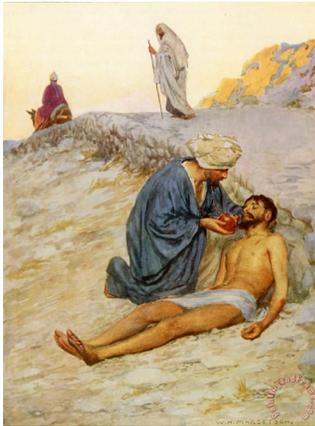
Love as Reality and Ideal:

Theological and Ethical Variations

Professor Edmund Santurri

Monday, Wednesday, Friday (9:05-10:00)

Spring 2018



It is often said that Christian love or agape is the foundation of Christian ethics. Indeed, when asked by the lawyer which of the commandments is greatest, Jesus says "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22: 37-39). But what primarily is meant by love? Are radical demands such as loving one's enemies and laying down one's life for friends realistic prescriptions or ideal aspirations? With these two questions in mind, the seminar will consider traditional and contemporary interpretations of Christian love. We shall explore the relation between Christian love and equal regard, unconditionality, self-sacrifice, self-love, natural desire, happiness, mutuality, erotic love, friendship, familial love, camaraderie, group loyalty, civic association, justice, nonviolence, coercion, and war. We shall also trace the implications of Christian love for political life, and we shall assess, among other things, Max Weber's claim that "whoever wants to engage in politics at all ... lets himself in for the diabolic forces lurking in all violence....The genius or demon of politics lives in an inner tension with the god of love, as well as with the Christian God as expressed by the church."