Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Course Profile

Course # and Title  RHS/RHTH 521 – Enmity in Biblical and Contemporary US Racial Contexts

Instructor: Klaus-Peter Adam/Marvin Wickware  Semester/Year: Spring 2021

Short Description (1-2 Sentences):
This course will address the concept of enmity from a variety of angles, drawing connections between biblical law, the Psalms, legal practices of kinship-based societies throughout history (including those kinship-based elements of US urban culture in areas marked by gang activity), political theology, black studies, and contemporary racial enemy relations that encode the ongoing life of white supremacy and colonialism.

Delivery Mode:
Synchronous online sessions (90-120 minutes) with asynchronous course elements
[NOTE: if the state of the pandemic allows, we will replace synchronous online sessions with in-person sessions that allow online participation by remote students]

Course Rationale and Description
(Why do we offer this course? Which of LSTC’s degree program learning outcomes does it address?):

The biblical command “Love your neighbor!” (Lev 19:18b) is arguably one of the best known ethical sentences in Judaism and Christianity. This course takes seriously the heritage of the Hebrew and Greek bible, as well as the private and societal forms enmity takes in contemporary US society. As such, this course is relevant in biblical law and ethics and in Christian ethics, and will spend roughly equal time drawing on each of these disciplines.

This course defines private enmity and friendship (“love”) as social constructs of relevance in the reference frame of Biblical law. Describing conflict settlement mechanisms and the social construct of hate in Ancient Israel, this course interprets the fundamental command “Love your neighbor!” against the backdrop of everyday exposure to quarrels and their consequences, comparable to litigiousness in contemporary societies.

The selected biblical readings offer two further insights. First, hate and enmity can be understood as social constructs. In a legal anthropological analysis, the course presents a comparative perspective of legal anthropology and establishes hallmarks of the social construct of an opponent in conflict settlement in kinship-based societies. Examples from the Psalms further clarify the meaning of enmity in feuding culture in the absence of law enforcement. Second, using a legal anthropological lens in relation to feuding patterns in various kinship based societies, this course shows the parallels between such patterns from the Ancient world to the modern Mediterranean and to the sub-legal fields of US urban culture in areas marked by gang activity. The legal anthropological analysis provides categories for an informed discourse on conflict transformation, on historical constructs of enmity, and on the role of law enforcement (“Defund the Police”) from a legal-historical and sociological point of view.
In turning to the discipline of Christian ethics, the course will shift its attention from private enmity to larger-scale enemy relations. Drawing first on political philosophy and theology (e.g., Chantal Mouffe, Barnor Hesse, Vincent Lloyd), this course will sketch out the discourse of enmity that responds centrally to the work of political philosopher (and, sadly, prominent Nazi party member) Carl Schmitt. This discourse will be connected with works in black studies (particularly Afro-pessimist writings) that highlight the relations of racial enmity that ground key economic, political, and cultural dimensions of contemporary US society.

The course will conclude with attention to pastoral and political responses to contemporary manifestations of the modes of enmity discussed throughout the semester.

Additional rationale for course in Advanced Studies:
This course can be taken in the sequence of 6 (Th.M.) or 12 (Ph.D.) that introduce students to the literature and methods of their disciplines (e.g., details of biblical literary genres, the development of the tradition and to the interpretation of the books of the Old Testament, philosophical and theological discourses in Christian ethics). Students will become familiar with the resources and the scholarship of the legal material and of ethics in the Hebrew Bible. In this course students will enhance their abilities to formulate productive questions about biblical and about Christian ethics and to engage in critical scholarly discussions. This course will enable them to pursue scholarly research about the themes of conflict transformation, hate and love as forms of behavior. It will also introduce to legal corpora and to the ethos of the Old Testament. Students will be able to integrate the themes of this course with their overall competence in biblical studies, in theology as well as in other academic disciplines. This course in the curriculum of Th.M. and Ph.D. also intends to enable the participants to teach a section on law and ethics in an introductory college course in Old Testament/Hebrew Bible.

Course Learning Outcomes (Learners will be able to):
(What difference will this course make to students’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices?)
1) recognize basic information about the bible (esp. biblical laws and ethics)
2) discuss the history of the bible (esp. biblical law)
3) recognize diverse genres of the bible (esp. in law and the Psalms)
4) compare and contrast texts from biblical laws and Psalms
5) analyze biblical texts in their original contexts and using research tools and interpretive methods
6) relate contexts of the bible to contemporary challenges and contexts.
7) articulate the concept of enmity in relation to political theological perspectives
8) analyze and assess social locations and cultural/religious contexts, in particular with reference to conflict transformation and social constructs of enmity.
9) speak theologically and pastorally about structural inequalities present in society, namely in conflict settlement patterns in antiquity and in sub-legal fields in US urban societies
10) recognize and greet difference in social segments of US society with understanding, namely in cultures of conflict settlement in underserved and underequipped urban communities, while persuasively presenting the Christian heritage in multi-religious contexts.

Advanced studies students will additionally be able to:
11) design a college course on the ethics of neighborly love in the Hebrew Bible
12) formulate productive questions about the social categories “neighbor”, “friend”, “enemy”
13) engage in a critical scholarly debate with professors and peers around the complex themes of enemies and friends in diverse parts of the Old Testament in the Law, in the Psalms and in Wisdom Literature in oral and written form
14) engage in a critical discussion with professors and peers about the categories of private dispute settlement in Ancient Israel and Ancient Greece
15) engage critically in a discourse about the meaning and place of the command to love the neighbor in the discipline of Christian ethics

**Strategies for Learning:**
(How shall we go about achieving these outcomes?)
- Reading (and, if possible, translation) of prepared biblical texts.
- Reading secondary literature assignments.
- Short quizzes reinforcing knowledge of reading assignments
- Detailed discussion of the biblical texts in their original languages and of scholarly commentaries in class.
- An oral presentation of the participants’ exegetical work on a biblical passage or on a contemporary ethical issue in class, including a 1,000-word document (handout).
- An exegetical paper or a paper in Christian ethics on this ethically or legally relevant passage based on the Hebrew and Greek text (or based on a comparison of English translations, depending on language qualifications) using the historical-critical method.
- Alternate assignments include the preparation and practice of a service in the liturgical format “Witnesses of violence speak out” that accompanies a victim of violence and enables them to speak out about their experience in the context of a worship service in a faith community.
- Weekly oral summaries of biblical texts and of secondary literature, based on written notes (keyword summaries of fundamental readings, 400-1,000 words).

**Assessment:**
(How shall we know if we—students and instructors—have been successful in achieving the outcomes?)
- Thoughtful oral feedback during classroom discussions.
- Guiding oral feedback during small group work in class.
- Written criticisms including evaluation of quizzes.
- Evaluation of the style, the structure, and the descriptive accuracy of reports on scholarly works.
- Criticism of the methodology and of the content and further advice on bibliography for the exegetical or Christian ethics paper.
- Individual academic mentoring for students with particular research interests

**Bibliography:** No texts will be required for purchase. However, participants interested in the field of biblical law are encouraged to purchase one introduction: