

AN INTENSIVE SEMINAR FOR TH.M. AND PH.D. STUDENTS  
OFFERED BY THE POSTGRADUATE DEPARTMENT OF TAIWAN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

## ETHICS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

**INSTRUCTOR: PROF. ANDREAS SCHUELE, UNIVERSITY OF LEIPZIG**

**PROFESSOR OF OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY AND EXEGESIS AND DIRECTOR OF  
THE INSTITUTE OF JUDAIC STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEIPZIG, GERMANY  
(DR. PHIL. IN SEMITICS; DR. THEOL. IN OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES; DR. HABIL.)**

**Date: March 20-22 / March 27-29, 2023 (10 sessions)**

**Morning session: 9:00-11:50am**

**Afternoon session: 2:00-4:50pm**

**Place:** Taiwan Graduate School of Theology, Meeting Room of the Theologians' Hall (神學人會館會議室)

**Credits: 3 (30 hours)**

### **Course explanation and requirements:**

Taiwan Graduate School of Theology (TGST) / Taiwan Theological College and Seminary is honored to receive Prof. Dr. Dr. Andreas Schuele as its speaker for the Mackay Lectures, May 13-15, 2023 on "A Voice from the Past, a Word for the Present: Reading the Book of Isaiah." Following that, Prof. Schuele will kindly offer an intensive seminar on "Ethics of the Old Testament" for Th.M. and Ph.D. students at the school. To cherish this rare opportunity for learning and to foster (interdisciplinary, intercollegiate) dialogue between graduate students, TGST would like to open this seminar to Th.M. and Ph.D. students in Bible and theology at other seminaries or schools in or around the Taipei area. Below are a few explanations about the course:

1. The seminar will be conducted in English. The attendants need to have at least moderate English communication skills in order to take part in discussion. It is recommended that students have basic Hebrew reading ability. To ensure quality of the discussion and an appropriate number of students, priority of seating is given to those who take the course for credits. **Registration Deadline: February 13 (Mon.), on a first-come-first-serve basis.**
2. Online learning for credits: Students from schools other than TGST can apply to take the course online for credits upon the approval of the head of the Postgraduate Department of TGST.
3. Auditing: Interested M.Div. students from TGST can apply to audit the seminar, but their application (using the registration form) must be approved by their mentor and the head of the Postgraduate Department. And to keep their qualification, they must commit to attend the whole course except the sessions during which they have M.Div. classes. Due to the limited number of seats, the school will likely arrange to put auditing students online.
4. **Course requirements:**
  - (1) Read the assigned biblical texts and the books in the reading list in advance of the course.
  - (2) Take part proactively and engagingly in classroom discussion.

- (3) Do an oral presentation in class that reviews a full-length book from the reading list (15-20 minutes).
- (4) Submit the above book review in written form (probably around 8-10 pages of A4 paper, doubled-spaced).
5. Upon the approval of the instructor, the school plans to record the sessions for internal, non-commercial, educational purposes, mainly for registered students to rewatch the class to review the content, and for faculty and recommended students of TGST to learn about the subject. If, however, a student does not wish his/her contributions to the class be recorded, he/she can sign on the registration form in advance to decline recording any of their utterances. Likewise, if a student has some concerns when expressing one's viewpoints, one could ask that the recording be paused anytime.
6. For questions regarding registration, cross-registration form (跨校選課單), tuition fee, and other administrative matters, please contact assistant to the postgraduate department of TGST: tgstpost@tgst.edu.tw; 02-28822370 #210, 何秋子姐妹. Thanks!

## A. SYLLABUS

This seminar will provide a broad overview of methodological and content-related questions in the field of Old Testament ethics. Particular emphasis will be given to the relationship between 'God', 'self', and 'neighbor' as the specific setting from which ethical considerations emerge.

Except for the first, we will discuss a set of biblical texts in each session. Please read these texts carefully in advance (if possible, in the original Hebrew) and note any insights, difficulties, or questions that came to your mind with regard to the topic of the session. The reading list is for your general preparation for this seminar and will provide you with the basic concepts and results of Old Testament scholarship about ethics and related topics.

### **1. The task of ethics in biblical studies (March 20, morning)**

In this first session, we will take a general approach and reflect on 'ethics' as a field of the human sciences. What do we mean by 'ethics'? How is ethics different from 'law'? Is ethics a normative or a descriptive endeavor? For our purposes of particular significance: where and how do ethics and religion intersect, and how does this provide orientation for the study of the Old Testament?

### **2. Justice, righteousness, and mercifulness. The general matrix of Old Testament ethics. (March 20, afternoon)**

In this first content-related session, we will explore what one might call the matrix of Old Testament ethics – justice, righteousness, mercifulness – along several examples from the law codes of the Pentateuch and from the prophets.

*Texts to prepare: Exod 20–23; Amos 3–6; Isa 5; 56*

### **3. Who is my neighbor? A question that marks the starting point. (March 21, morning)**

Today, we will focus on the most basic, ethically relevant relation – the human-to-human encounter. Although the wording never explicitly occurs in the Old Testament, the implicit question behind many texts that seek to provide moral orientation is the following: ‘who is my neighbor?’ Or put in different terms, the Old Testament assumes that the neighbor is a specific person, rather than a general subject, who requires particular forms of attention, recognition, and respect.

*Texts to prepare: Lev 19; Prov 3*

#### **4. Between God and neighbor – the decalogue as the foundation of theological ethics.** (March 21, afternoon)

So far, we have not developed a specifically *theological* perspective towards ethics. This will be the task of this session. The decalogue may be the most pertinent document in this regard. We will reflect on the composition and particular meaning of both versions of the decalogue in Exod 20 and Deut 5.

*Texts to prepare: Gen 1; Exod 1–14; 20; Deut 5*

#### **5. Is violence ethically tolerable?** (March 22, morning)

After our endeavors into some of the foundational concepts of Old Testament ethics, we will, in this and the following session, focus on two ‘problem cases’. The first one is the language of violence. Violence is not only implicitly tolerated but, in certain cases, explicitly mandated, which raises ethical concerns, especially from a contemporary point of view.

*Texts to prepare: Exod 32; Josh 10; Ezek 23; Gen 6:9–12; Isa 2:1–4; Dan 7*

#### **6. ‘Nature’ and ethics: sexuality as a test case** (March 27, morning)

Another debated subject of OT ethics are regulations about people’s sexual lives. Especially the “Holiness Code” places considerable emphasis on this aspect. This raises the question if and how such regulations are justified. As we shall see, this is where the biblical text employs the concept of “nature” and the “natural”.

*Texts to prepare: Lev 18; 20*

#### **7. Morality and wisdom: Concepts of human agency** (March 27, afternoon)

So far, we have looked mostly at the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament. We will now open up our perspective to the third part of the OT canon, especially to the sapiential books. How does traditional wisdom, as in the book of Proverbs, inform and shape moral conduct?

*Texts to prepare: Proverbs 1–9; 31*

#### **8. The role of solidarity and friendship in ethics** (March 28, morning)

In this session, we will return to the initial question ‘who is my neighbor?’ that the Pentateuch and the Prophets address in the form of divine commandment. However, in a wisdom context, this question takes on a different tone. In the book of Job in particular and also in Ecclesiastes, the abiding question becomes ‘who is my friend?’

*Texts to prepare: Eccl 3–9; Job 14–19*

**9. Learning from experiential stories: narrative ethics** (March 28, afternoon)

At least briefly, we will look at OT examples of what has been called “narrative ethics”. Unlike in the law codes or prophetic texts, morality is not implemented in the form of commandments but by (narrative) example.

*Texts to prepare: Genesis 37–50; Ruth 1–4; Ester 1–9*

**10. Biblical Ethics: The ‘Sermon on the Mount’ as an example.** (March 29, morning)

In conclusion to the seminar, we will discuss the question if and to what extent OT ethics can be (or cannot be) the foundation of a biblical ethics. For this, we will turn to the Sermon on the Mount, which presents itself as a reinterpretation and condensation of Old Testament ethics.

*Text to prepare: Matt 5–7*

**B. READING LIST**

John Barton, *Ethics and the Old Testament*, London: SCM Press, 2002, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (112 pp.).

Hendrik Bosman, “Bookends of Old Testament Ethics. The First and Tenth Commandments and Human Dignity”, in: *Scriptura* 106 (2011), 93–100.

William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis. A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994 (164 pp).

Patrick D. Miller, *The Way of the Lord. Essays in Old Testament Theology*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, 3-163.

Eckart Otto, *Theological Ethics of the Old Testament*, Nashville (TN): Abingdon Press, 2010,

Andreas Schuele, “The Dignity of the Image. A Re-Reading of the Priestly Prehistory”, in: A. Schuele, *Theology from the Beginning*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017, 45-62. (will be sent to registered students in PDF format)

Andreas Schuele, “On Earth as it is in heaven. Eschatology and the Ethics of Forgiveness”, in: A. Schuele, *Theology from the Beginning*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017, 201-220. (will be sent to registered students in PDF format)

**Further Resources:**

John Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017

C.L. Crouch, *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

