

Julia M. O'Brien

Presentation Descriptions (Selected)



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Multiple formats offered

- lecture
- religious education sessions
- full day or weekend Workshops

VIOLENCE AND THE BIBLE: WHAT'S A CHRISTIAN TO DO?

A close look at some of the violent texts of the Old and New Testaments (such as those depicting war, violence against women and children, and a vengeful God), considering how they may have functioned in the ancient world and what might constitute a faithful reading of them today.

Coming to Terms with Anger, in the Bible and in Ourselves

Christians tend to dislike Old Testament descriptions of God as angry, preferring instead what they see as the New Testament vision of a God of love. And yet, many biblical books portray God as angry. We consider various ways of understanding these texts and reflect on their value for today.

SEX IN/AND THE OT

The Old Testament's view of sexuality is usually described in one of two opposite ways: as proof that God intends sex to be reserved for heterosexual marriage ("it's Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve!") or as a primitive patriarchal code irrelevant for the modern world ("it condones polygamy and treats women as property!"). Are these fair assessments of the Old Testament? We consider the understandings of sex and the body that run throughout these diverse texts, some sociological dimensions of ancient Israel, and the ways in which ancient views compare with our own.

THE BIBLE AND FAMILY VALUES

What does the “biblical family” look like? We (1) learn how sociologists and scholars think people lived and worked in biblical times; (2) consider how that information opens up new understandings of biblical stories; and (3) compare the economic and social settings of our own lives with those of our ancestors in faith.

READING AND WRITING MIDRASH: PLAYING IN THE GAPS OF THE BIBLE'S STORIES

Adam had a first wife named Lilith? The arm of Pharaoh's daughter miraculously lengthened so she could reach the baby Moses floating in the Nile? These and other wonderful tales are examples of Jewish Midrash, a tradition of filling in the gaps in biblical stories with the help of other texts, religious tradition, and human imagination. We'll consider how Judaism has used Midrash to keep Scripture relevant in new situations and experiment with writing some responsible Christian Midrash of our own.

READING THE BIBLE AS AN ADULT

Many adults are “stuck” in thinking about and reading the Bible the same way they did when they were children. This workshop invites us to rethink some famous Bible stories (David and Goliath, Jonah, and others), noticing aspects of the stories that are usually ignored but that may provide guidance for issues that face adults. That will lead us to think about the Bible in general: what is the Bible, anyway? What are some different ways that the Bible can be read faithfully?

KING DAVID: GOOD GUY, BAD GUY, OR JUST A GUY?

The sweet singer of Israel or a cold-blooded killer? A brave boy who defeated a giant or a dysfunctional parent and husband? Who was King David? This course explores the varied ways this iconic biblical character has been portrayed—by biblical authors, historians, and artists—and invites to consider our own role in retelling his story.

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AND MIDDLE EAST POLITICS

While fundamentalists' support for the state of Israel has received much attention in the media, many progressive Protestants in the United States also read the Bible as supporting exclusive Jewish claims the Holy Land. Where did this way of reading the Bible come from and what are its alternatives? In these two sessions, Julia O'Brien will share some of her experiences at an August 2011 conference held in Bethlehem, in which scholars from around the world addressed the challenges that Western biblical interpretation pose for Palestinian Christians and their supporters.

THE ART OF THE BIBLICAL SHORT STORY: RUTH AND JONAH

In this course, we consider the books of Ruth and Jonah, often compared to the modern genre of short story. What can we say about the history behind the writing of these books? What are they about? And how can we find value in them today?

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE PROPHETS

The biblical prophets, especially Amos and Micah, are often heralded as advocates for social justice. In this course, we'll look at what Amos, Micah, and selected other prophets have to say about economic and social justice and the ways in which these books have been interpreted.

OTHER TOPICS

- Studying the Old Testament lectionary texts for seasons of the church year
- Contemporary Ethical Issues and the Bible
- Studies of Biblical Books
- Introductions to Biblical Studies
- Contemporary Methods of Biblical Studies

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