Classical Jewish Thought
JTHT 318

A. Green
Spring 5773/2013 Syllabus

BIBLICAL AND RABBINIC THEOLOGY

The purpose of the course is to learn and discuss the classical Biblical and rabbinic sources and rubrics around key issues of Jewish theology, God, Creation, and Torah/Revelation.

Reading and text preparation are to precede each class. Class is based on the assumption that this preparatory work has been done.

Please note that about half of the course is based on A. J. Heschel’s Heavenly Torah. (You will need to buy this book and bring it to class.) No texts are assigned in those weeks, as Heschel’s work is studded with textual examples. You are encouraged to look upon Heschel’s work as a way of discovering many important texts. Read the Heschel before your Bet Midrash, and spend the Bet Midrash session looking up and discussing the Hebrew original of those texts of greatest interest to you. We will refer to the Hebrew texts in class, assuming you have seen them. Students with strong Hebrew are urged to buy and read Heschel in the original Torah min ha-Shamayim, a masterpiece of classical Hebrew style.

You should also purchase or obtain a copy of Yochanan Muffs’ The Personhood of God.

Written assignments:

1) DUE IN WEEK 5 – Take two of the texts found in the Week 3 booklet and write two one-to-two page Divrey Torah around them.

2) DUE AT END OF SEMESTER – Read the third chapter (“Torah: Word Out of Silence”) chapter of my new book Radical Judaism and write A) a reflection on the connection between my work and Heschel’s, regarding Torah; B) your own alternative way of using Heschel’s insights in creating a contemporary theology of Torah; C) a personal theology of Torah, based on and/or critiquing mine as presented in the book; D) some other variant on the above. 5-10 pages.

Oral presentations:

Each week, after the first, a student will summarize and lead a discussion of the secondary readings. Please sign up.

1. God in the Bible I

Readings:
S. David Sperling, “Israel’s Religion in the Ancient Near East” (In A. Green, ed., Jewish Spirituality I)**

2. God in the Bible II


Readings:
Muffs, Personhood, 55-94.

3. God in the Aggadah I: Introductory Sources (A two-week unit)

Texts: Selected

Readings:
David Stern, Imitatio Hominis: Anthropomorphism and the Character(s) of God”
_____ , Parables in Midrash, 4-8; 97-101.*
A. Green, “The Children in Egypt and the Theophany at the Sea”

4. God in the Aggadah II: Korban, Mishkan, ‘Avodah

Readings:
Heschel, Heavenly Torah  pp. 46-56; 71-92, 189-207.

5. God in the Aggadah III: Shekhinah, Religious Experience

Reading:
Heschel, Heavenly Torah  93-126, 279-288, 303-318

6. God in the Merkavah Literature


Readings:
J. Dan, “The Religious Experience of the Merkavah”* (In Green, Jewish Spirituality)

7. Creation

Texts: Bereshit 1-2. Psalm104,
Bereshit Rabbah 1:10; 3:2; 3:9; 9:2.
Hagigah 12a (Or ha-Ganuz)
Tanhuma Buber p. 11
Reading:
E. A. Urbach, *The Sages*, 184-213

8. Redemption from Egypt

Text: Shemot 12-14
*Haggadah shel Pesah* (from ‘Avadim Hayyinu through Ga’al Yisr’ael)

Readings:
*My People’s Passover Haggadah*, selected commentaries to text.

9. Revelation in the Bible

Texts:
Shemot 19; 24; Devarim 4-6; Nehemiah 9

Reading:
George Savran, “The Visual Representation of the Divine”

10. Revelation in the Aggadah I: God and the Prophet

Reading:

11. Revelation in the Aggadah II: Minimalist and Maximalist Views

Reading:
Weiss-Halivni, “On Man’s Role in Revelation:

12. Revelation III: The Unfinished Torah

Readings:
G. Scholem, “Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories in Judaism”

13. Israel and Torah: Female and Marital Imagery

Readings:
Green, “The Song of Songs in Early Jewish Mysticism”
Elliot Wolfson, “Female Imaging of the Torah”