

2015 Winning Essay by Jared Townley

All theology majors are required to intensify a course, most typically during their junior year, in order to prepare for their senior seminar paper. Dr. Driver's class entitled "Early Christian Social Thought" drew my attention and I then decided to complete an annotated bibliography on the very broad topic of 'early Christian families'. I found a plethora of sources via general keyword searches in the library catalog and via WorldCat searches which resulted in even more interlibrary loan books.

Now, fast forward to the senior seminar class. I came into the class understanding that I was going to write a very long paper and that to effectively do this I was also going to have to narrow my topic; so when Dr. Heider encouraged us to meet with the theology librarian Rebecca Butler I jumped on the recommendation to consult her. My first meeting with Becca all but confirmed my suspicions that I did not have any idea of what I wanted to research. After reassuring me that it was the right thing to do, by beginning so early with my research, she prompted me to define family and what "kind" of family I was going to focus on in my paper. This brought me to the sociology section of the library scouring the stacks for books on what formed a "nuclear family".

After realizing that even the "nuclear family" was still too broad to make connections between late antiquity and modern Christianity, I had reached a dead point in my research. Once again, Becca was instrumental in helping me determine where I would take my research next. We discussed my interest in the Old Testament and the various stories of familial relations that drew my interest. After thinking about multiple possibilities, I chose the story of Esau and Jacob that is found in Genesis 25:19-34 because I was interested in the disjunction of the law of the primogeniture (inheritance).

Having decided what piece of scripture I was going research, the next step was to do a complete textual analysis. I located all of the commentary sources that the library had regarding the text I was researching and set out to learn everything that scholars (both Christian and Jewish) had to say about the text. During this stage of my research I consulted authors; Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles Aalders and Nahum Sarna (JPS Torah Commentary). After my conclusive research regarding the text, two opportunities for final topics arose: The Redemption of Esau or Jacob and The Law of the Primogeniture. Because of the availability of sources via the ATLA database, I choose to further research Jacob's role within the story.

I began to do searches via WorldCat to find books about the story of Esau and Jacob. A keyword search for Jacob and Esau brought me to a book entitled Jacob and the Divine Trickster by John Anderson. Not only did I find the title interesting, but also after reading a selection of the chapters I found that I was incredibly intrigued with the idea of God as trickster. This is what ultimately propelled me to my final research topic: How could a God who is "just" use means of trickery and deception to go against the laws of primogeniture (inheritance) that God had already put into place?

After reaching this point in my research, I knew that I could begin to do very specific searches. I went to ATLA and used the scripture index to locate specific verses and sections that pertained to "inheritance" "Jacob" "law of primogeniture" "Esau" "deception". Through these searches, I found more than enough information to write my paper.

After I had written my paper, I realized that I had not actually used all of my sources in my paper, but this does not mean they were not important. Each of the sources I came across lead me to the next

source and furthered the development of my thesis. It is for this reason that I included only the sources I found most relevant to the topic and research in my paper.

My research allowed me to see the invaluable importance of having someone knowledgeable in the field assist in all stages of development and editing. Without the help of Rebecca Butler and the seemingly limitless resources that the Christopher Center provided, my paper not only would have been an unbearable burden, but the joy of researching a topic that I thoroughly enjoyed would not have been possible.