

SBL SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Interview with Mr. Alessandro Rivera Graduate, University of Miami 21 January 2022

LaToya Leary: Hey Alessandro. It's great to meet you. Can you tell me a little about yourself? What do you study? What school do you attend?

I believe you recently graduated. Tell us a bit about what you are doing now.

Alessandro Rivera: My name is Alessandro Rivera. I am 22 years old. I am originally born and raised in Puerto Rico. I came here to Miami around four and a half years ago for school on a full tuition scholarship to the University of Miami. I came to UM thinking I was going to study to be a doctor, but biology, chemistry, and science in general is not my passion. I started taking religion classes. I always had an inclining towards religion. I grew up going to church so I just wanted to explore more things about my faith. Through that, I developed an academic or intellectual interest towards my own faith. I switched over to the religious studies major and graduated last year and now I'm in the process of starting my Masters in Theological Studies at Trinity University.



LaToya: Awesome! Congratulations! Are you at Trinity University right now or are you in the application process? How's that working?

Alessandro: So I'm supposed to have my first class tonight. And I say "I'm supposed to" because there's a lot going on. I got married three months ago.

LaToya: Oh! Congrats!

Alessandro: Thank you! It's been a lot at the same time. I was supposed to start classes two weeks ago but I had a lot going on... moving. There's a lot of transition so if all goes well I should be starting my Masters today!

LaToya: Awesome! Congrats again and good luck on your first day! So tell me more about how you responded, what did you feel, what did you think when Dr. Callender asked you to participate in this partnership?

Alessandro: Well, first of all, I was honored. I was humbled. I mean, I just genuinely love the field of religion. I love having these conversations in both a personal and an academic setting with people from different walks of life. I love having these conversations so to be able to sit in a class and learn from someone of such a high caliber like Dr. Callender... he's such and amazing, amazing professor... so I was so honored every time I sat in a classroom with him, let alone to be invited to write on a project with him. The thoughts that ran through my mind was like, "Is this happening?" I remember receiving the email and I was like... I think I mentioned in the email "Are you sure? You wrote to Alessandro. I don't know if you meant to write to anyone else." I couldn't believe it. I was truly honored and I was excited about it. I said yes automatically. I didn't even have to think about it. I had a lot going on at the time, but I was like "this is a once in a lifetime opportunity" so yeah, I just hopped on board.

LaToya: Cool. In this partnership you were able to experience the writing and publication process in ways that undergraduates typically do not experience. I want to know more about your experience. Talk to me about one of the most impactful experiences you've had.

Leviathan

by Alessandro Rivera ; Dexter Callender

Monsters inspire fear, pose an existential threat, and embody the forces of chaos. For the biblical writers and their audiences, Leviathan was just that, and perhaps more.

How is Leviathan typically portrayed?

Biblical references locate Leviathan within a widespread and venerable tradition of watery serpentine beings. Such monsters embody chaos as cosmic foes of an order-imposing deity. According to Isa 27:1 the Lord will punish Leviathan, "the fleeing serpent," "the twisting serpent," and "the dragon"—phrases that describe the similarly named Litan of Ugaritic literature (KTU 1.5 i:1-3). Similarly, in Ps 74:13-14, the psalmist seeks relief from God, who "broke the heads of the dragon in the waters" and "crushed the heads of Leviathan." Within this broad tradition also stand Tiamat of the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, Apopis of Egyptian solar mythology, as well as other biblical figures such as Rahab (see Job 26:12; Ps 89:10; Isa 51:10).



Alessandro: Yeah. Well, I think that the thing that really stuck out to me was how long it took. I knew that writing, editing, publishing takes a while, but me being... I don't want to say ignorant, but it was my first time in all of this so I guess I was a little bit ignorant. I was new to the process. In my mind I thought, "Oh, it's a short article. It shouldn't take too

long." I guess the entire process... there were multiple drafts. I had multiple meetings with Dr. Callender. I thought it was going to be like... not an informal thing. I knew it was a big deal, but because of what the article encompassed... it was an article... it was meant to be short so I thought it would be way shorter, but the complexity of writing and publishing, that really surprised me. I liked the process. I thought it was amazing because not only did we have multiple meetings to discuss what we were going to talk about, but we wrote multiple drafts, and then on top of that, once we submitted the first draft, we got peer reviewed, which I thought was awesome. It's amazing to be able to hear feedback from other people in the field and see what their insights are, what they liked, what they didn't like, what suggestions they had. That was really interesting and I thought that was definitely a new experience and I genuinely loved it. I can't imagine it took that long for an article, I can't imagine a book. I remember thinking, "if I want to write a book, it's going to take a long time so maybe I should start writing now."

LaToya: Yeah. Books take quite a bit. Do you have any plans for future graduate study post MATS?

Alessandro: Honestly, I don't know right now. I've always loved studying. I've always said that if I could just get paid for living to study, I would. Right now, I work in the mortgage industry and I love my job, but my heart is torn between a professional passion like what I do with my job and my passion for academia. I feel like I am always torn in the middle. I think that will sort itself out eventually. As of right now, I am just taking it one day at a time. I'll finish my Masters and depending on where we are once I finish that personally, professionally... we'll see. I would love to get a PhD one day. It's not in the realm of impossibility, but right now I don't know.

LaToya: Ok. That makes a lot of sense. Thanks for chatting with me!!!