2014

504-01 Liberating Bible: Scripture and Justice for the 21st Century

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General Description:
This course critically investigates the call of Hebrew and Christian scriptures to responsible living, focusing on Scripture passages that deal with social and environmental justice. The course also serves as an introduction to the literary, historical, and religious context of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Scriptures. It is a foundational course for Scripture study and satisfies a core requirement for the M.A. in Theology for all three tracks: Ethics, Spirituality, and Professional Practice (ESPP); Solidarity and Sustainability in a Global Context (SSGC); Applied Spirituality and Pastoral Care (ASPC).

Course Objectives:
As a result of completing this course, the student will . . .
1. Gain familiarity with important texts and concepts from the Bible.
2. Apply critical scholarly approaches to interpreting Scripture.
3. Develop an understanding of the important historical and sociological contexts for scriptural texts.
4. Become knowledgeable about Scripture passages dealing with or pertinent to social and environmental justice.
5. Use Scriptural passages as a resource for theological reflection.
6. Apply appropriate biblical passages to issues of social and environmental justice current in today’s global society.

Texts: The most important text for this course is the Bible itself. The most important tasks in this course are reading, interrogating, and interpreting the Bible. Two supporting textbooks will be used for the course: a general introduction to the Bible and an introduction to biblical exegesis (a systematic method of interpretation). It is also recommended that the student acquire a study Bible containing the full text of the Bible, including the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament) and the Christian Scriptures (or New Testament).


There will be additional readings posted on E-Reserves or the Canvas online resource.
Course Requirements

(1) Class Attendance, Online Discussion, and Participation. The structure of the course emphasizes class discussion, so it will be especially important for students to attend regularly, accomplish assigned readings, and contribute to discussions. If you find that absences beyond 2 class sessions are unavoidable, please negotiate with the professor about make-up sessions and assignments. It is best to read the textbook or Scripture assignments for each class session prior to that day’s class meeting, with the exception of the first session, of course. The quality of one’s participation is more important than quantity. “Quality” participation involves careful preparation, insightful discussion, and pertinent questions. This course will use the “Discussion” feature of the “Canvas” web-based resource. Students will be required to post responses to a question or questions posed by the professor. Students will respond directly to the question. Students are also encouraged to read responses posted by classmates so that they can reflect upon others’ contributions as well. Students must post a response by 3:00 p.m. the day of the class session for which the response is due, to give the professor time to read responses before class. Students may find the Discussion link on the home Canvas page on the left side. Students can access the home page by means of the Canvas tab on the portal or by the following URL: https://canvas.xavier.edu/login.

(2) In-Class Presentation: According to a schedule negotiated in class, each participant will make a short in-class presentation (15-20 minutes). Each participant will cover either the biblical selections assigned for that class (Option A) or the secondary literature assigned for the day (Option B). **Option A**: In the case of the biblical selections, the participant will introduce the class to some of the interpretive issues discerned in her/his reading. It is appropriate to draw on secondary literature in preparation. **Option B**: If the individual chooses to focus instead on the assigned secondary literature, the participant may wish to analyze the theory presented by the author, or offer an alternative theory, or to critique any interpretations offered by the theorist. Participants will sign up for the date for their presentation in class the second class session of the course.

(4) A Mid-term examination will be distributed by Tuesday, February 11. The examination is in “take-home” essay format to be handed in by 6:00 p.m. Tuesday, February 25.

(5) Two Papers are required. The first paper (8-10 pages, double-spaced) will focus on a particular passage from the Hebrew Bible and interpret it in detail as an exegetical exercise. The process of exegesis will be discussed early in the semester. The second paper (8-10 pages, double-spaced) will focus on a particular passage from the Christian Scriptures and interpret in detail as an exegetical exercise. Explicit and detailed guidelines for the papers will be posted on Canvas under Assignments. Important aspects of any of these papers will be the application of the procedures of exegesis and an incorporation of secondary literature. In this way the participant can engage other interpreters in dialogue about a biblical passage. The first paper will be due by the beginning of class on Tuesday, February 11. The second paper will be due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, March 25.

(7) A Final examination will be posted Tuesday, April 22. Again, as in the case of the mid-term examination, the format of the exam will be “take-home,” essay format due Tuesday, May 6.
*** Grace days. Each student is entitled to a grace period for turning in assignments, up to a maximum of 7 days for the Spring 2014 Semester. This grace period means that you may turn in the mid-term examination late or hand in a paper late, as long as you do not exceed a total of 7 days for the Spring Semester. You need not offer the instructor an explanation for the late assignment, unless you exceed the limit. The 7 day grace period will only be extended in the case of a health or family emergency and that extension must be cleared with the instructor. Please use your grace days wisely. The grace days may not be used for the Final Examination.*****

Grade Assessment

The value of the above requirements is: Class attendance, participation, Canvas Discussion, and in-class presentation - 20%; Mid-Term Examination – 20%; First paper - 20%; Second paper – 20%; Final Examination – 20%. Numerical grades for these five factors will be weighted according to these percentages. The grading scale will be: A = 100-94%; A- = 93-92%; B+ = 91-90%; B = 89-87%; B- = 86-84%; C+ = 83-82%; C = 81-79%; C- = 78-76; D+ = 75-74%; D = 73-71%; D- 70-68%; F = 67-0% (See Xavier catalog, 43). Class attendance and participation may be used as subjective factors in grading, especially in borderline cases. For policy on departmental grading see http://www.xavier.edu/theology/Grading-Policy.cfm.

“Canvas Class” The professor has chosen to use the academic web-based resource “Canvas.” Ordinarily, a student can access the Canvas site through the “Canvas” Tab on the right of her or his portal home page. (Login to myxu). For an alternative way to access Canvas try the following URL:  https://canvas.xavier.edu/login.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE:

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January 14, 2014

Introduction to Interpreting the Bible: Hermeneutics and Exegesis

Harris, Understanding the Bible, Chapters One, Two, and Three

Hayes and Holladay, Biblical Exegesis, Chapter One, “Introducing Exegesis.”

View PowerPoint: The Task of Exegesis (Posted on Canvas)

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January 21, 2014

The Basis for Justice: Early Covenant Passages in the Pentateuch

Harris, Understanding the Bible, Chapter Four

Hayes and Holladay, Biblical Exegesis, Chapters Two and Three, “Historical Criticism” and “Grammatical Criticism.”

Optional Essay, E-Reserves: “A God of Life . . .”

Genesis 15 and 17

Exodus 3-4; 19-20; compare Deuteronomy 5:1-21

Leviticus 18, 19, 20 and 25


Deuteronomy 14-15; 23-24
January 28, 2014

*The Deuteronomistic History and Social Justice*
Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, Chapter Five
Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, Chapters Four and Five, “Literary Criticism” and “Form Criticism”
Optional essay on E-Reserves: “Forgiving Ahab”
Joshua 1, 2, 8, 24
1 Samuel 2; 2 Samuel 7, 11-12
1 Kings 5-8, 11-12
2 Kings 17, 18:1-12; 22-25

February 4, 2014

*The Hebrew Prophets and Social Justice*
Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, Chapter Six
E-Reserves: Adele Berlin, “Introduction to Hebrew Poetry”
Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, “Tradition Criticism” and “Redaction Criticism”
Amos 5
Hosea 1-3, 11
Micah 6
Jeremiah 5, 7, 22:11-23

February 11, 2014

*The Writings and Justice*
Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, Chapter Seven
Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, “Structuralist Criticism.”
Psalm 8; 89; 104; 132; 136.
Proverbs 2; 8 (cf. 7:32); 9, and 10.
Esther 1-5
*****First Exegesis Paper Due*****
*****Take-Home Midterm Exam Posted*****

February 18, 2014

*More on the Writings and Justice*
Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, Chapter Seven
Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, “Canonical Criticism.”
Esther 6-10
Job 28; 29-31; 38-42; Ecclesiastes 1-3.
February 25, 2014
*Between the Two Testaments*
Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, Chapters Eight and Nine
Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, “Exegesis with a Special Focus.”
1 Maccabees 14:25-49
2 Maccabees 4:30-38
Sirach 27
Tobit 1-14
*****Take-Home Mid-Term Examination Due*****

March 4, 2014
NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

March 11, 2014
*The New Testament*
*The Gospels*
Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, Chapters Ten and Eleven
Optional reading, E-Reserves: “I Was In Prison and You Visited Me.”
Mark 1-16
Matthew 1-28
Matthew 15:21-28 (Cf. Mark 7:24-30)

March 18, 2014
*The Gospels. Cont.*
Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, Chapter Eleven
Luke 1-24
John 1-21

March 25, 2014
*The Continuing Quest for the Historical Jesus*
*The Book of Acts*
Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, Chapter Twelve and Chapter Thirteen, 414-427.
Acts 1-28
*****Second Exegesis Paper Due*****
April 1, 2014
Paul and the Gentile Mission
Harris, Understanding the Bible, Chapter Thirteen, 430-452
1 Thessalonians
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians
Galatians

April 8, 2014
Paul and the Gentile Mission, Cont.
Harris, Understanding the Bible, 452-461
Romans
Philippians
Philemon

April 15, 2014
The Disputed Pauline Letters and the Pastoral Epistles
Harris, Understanding the Bible, 462-470
2 Thessalonians
Colossians
Ephesians
1 Timothy
2 Timothy
Titus

April 22, 2014
General Epistles and a Vision of End Time
Harris, Understanding the Bible, Chapter Fourteen, 471-490
Hebrews
James
1 Peter
Jude
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Revelation