The Bible and Building a Better World REST 392
Fall 2010

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FN Hall 203
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Hours: T/W/R 9:00 - 10 pm; W 5:30-6:30; R 4-5p; F by appointment

In our world evil is not an abstract scenario, but an existential fact (paraphrase). Albert Camus

“The future depends on what we do in the present.” Mohandas Gandhi

“Whatever we do, the world will bleed in.” Paul Rogat Loeb

The course will focus on the central biblical themes of righteousness, “doing justice,” and identifying with “the poor, the stranger, the outcast.” In the words of the prophet Micah, the LORD says, “To know me is to do justice.” What does this mean, to know the LORD? Special attention will be given to the Hebrew prophets and their concern for justice and righteousness, and Jesus’ revelation of the “higher righteousness” or agape in the Gospel According to Matthew, including the Sermon on the Mount. These themes/subjects will be studied through multiple lenses: scholarly exegesis, Jesus and the prophets, the context of the Bible as a whole, contemporary lives, and a praxis project (see Public Praxis website – Search on Marist home page), wherein students integrate critical biblical study with work towards building a better world. The course will also include Tracy Kidder’s iconic Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man who would Cure the World.

Requirements with weights toward 100% of course grade

1. **10%** Memorize personally meaningful biblical passages/verses.
2. **10%** Choose a particular biblical verse/passage/concept to reflectively live by during the term. Include weekly (usually brief) reflections on this intention in your written World-as-Text.
3. **30%** World-as-Text - keep a critical, reflective Journal of course readings (including Understanding the Bible – on reserve), media, class sessions, outside readings, film, resources, Newspaper articles, websites. In particular, document/illustrate public work, your own and others’, toward building a better world (citing references); identify biblical understanding of a “better world.” Include references to www.thebelovedcommunity.org. Roughly 2-3 well written pages a week of superb material. Evaluated 2 times – see schedule for DUE dates. 30 pages
4. **30%** Better World Project (Public Praxis) – explore ideas and take substantive action to better the world in some specific way individually or communally; produce a public document on this work, reflecting on/ describing/illustrating/analyzing/interpreting/relating to course material. Also project with detailed outline further action for the continuation of this work.
5. **20%** Attend class/join discourse/contribute insight/thoughtfulness/questions. Evidence of well-read assigned material counts heavily.
The Justice and Poverty Bible - central text of the course; in your reading, make occasional comparisons with other translations: the Revised Standard, the Jerusalem Bible, King James. Detect and Note any subtle changes in meaning with various interpretive translations.

Understanding the Bible – on reserve; 2-3 pages a week (your choice), include commentary in World-as-Text. Read at least 40 pages during the term

Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man who would Cure the World by Tracy Kidder. If you have read this book, you might read it again OR choose from the recommended list The Uses of Haiti by Paul Farmer (his best book and containing a critical understanding of Haiti) or In the Parish of the Poor by Jean-Bertrand Aristide (a trove of insight on Haiti from the perspective of a priest, the first democratically elected president of Haiti and friend of Farmer’s).

Liberation Theology by Robert McAfee Brown

Several books are Recommended for this course (check bookstore). Choose at least ONE to include as a course text. Include critical reflection on this text in your World-as-Text. Two of the books are staggeringly rich readings for this course: Tattoos on the Heart and The Least of These my Brethren. Read as many recommended as you choose, and include in your World-as-Text. Two nights ago I came home to Tattoos on the Heart (ordered through Amazon). I read all night – felt my heart swell, belly-laughed, gained a well of spiritual wonder, changed. I’ll recommend other books in class as options.

Journals, such as National Catholic Reporter, Sojourners, the Catholic Worker, for occasional inclusion in your World-as-Text; check out PBS’ weekly Religion & Ethics

Check out Religion and Politics sections of The New York Times for relating to course, and occasionally include in your World-as-Text.

Approximate reading schedule (media most weeks):

September 2 overall structure/landscape of Bible; Genesis Chapters 1 and 2
Create a good; relationship as good

September 9 Torah Genesis 18:19; Joseph Chapters 42-45; Exodus 1:8-14;
1:1-2; 9-18; 33-37; 23:22; 24:22; 25:10-12; 25-28; 35-55;
Numbers 9:14; Deuteronomy 1:16-17; 4:5-8; Shema Yisrael
6:4-9; 10:16-19; 14:28-29; 24:17-22
Mountains Beyond Mountains Chapters 1/2/3 - p32

Mountains Beyond Mountains  Chapters 4/5/6 - p84

September 23

Mountains Beyond Mountains  Chapters 4/5/6 - p84

September 30

Mountains Beyond Mountains  Chapters 9/10/11 – p.113

October 7

The Gospel According to Mark – Jesus as healer/“sell all you have and give to the poor” 10:19-27; supreme commandments 12:28-34

Liberation Theology overview/themes/preferential option...

October 14

The Gospel According to Matthew – “higher righteousness”/Sermon on Mount/forgiveness; ArchBishop Tutu on meaning and effect of forgiveness; justice – Servant Song 12:15-31; workers’ living wage; servant/slave 20:24-28; “the least of these my brethren” 25:31-45

Liberation Theology Chapters 3/4

DUE  World-as-Text

October 21

The Gospel According to Luke Chapter 1 Mary’s Magnificat;

3: 7-14; John the Baptist – message; Jesus’ inaugurates Ministry 4: 18/19 fulfills Isaiah 61; rich/poor 6: 20-25

The Good Samaritan 10: 25-37; heart’s treasure 12: 33/34; be humble 14: 12- 14; rich/poor 16:19-25; persist 18: 2-5
October 28  Liberation Theology starting point/solidarity/preferential option for poor/Jesus as liberator/restored relationship/
Maxim - “where you stand is what you see”/key references

November 11  the Letters of Paul – selections; selected text
November 18  Epistles/James – selections; selected text

DUE World-as-Text

THANKSGIVING WEEK

December 2  Kairos Document

DUE Better World Project Public Document

December 9  Public Presentation of Project

December 16  Communal celebration of semester’s achievement

Objectives and Outcome: to gain biblical knowledge; to study and practice critical hermeneutics; to learn of those embodying the biblical commandment of agape; to memorize personally meaningful Scripture; to better some hurting situation to the degree possible. The readings, media, and building project aim to achieve these goals.

“God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house. God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives. God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war. God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives, and God is with us if we are with them.” BONO

“To forgive another person from the heart is an act of liberation. We set that person free from the negative bonds that exist between us...We also free ourselves from the burden of being the ‘offended’ one.” Henri Nouwen

“If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness and if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday and the Lord will continually guide you and satisfy your desire in scorched places.” Isaiah 58: 9-11

“Bring about a better and more just world!” Cesar Chavez

“tell the oppressed the good news...Then they will rebuild cities that have been in ruins....I, the Lord, love justice!” Isaiah 61: 1/4/8