

REL 115: Interpreting Sacred Texts and Traditions

Topic: The Bible and Liberation

Agnes Scott College, Spring Semester 2010

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Course Description:

In this course we will be reading the biblical texts, both Hebrew Bible and New Testament, through the lenses of history, culture, politics, and social movements in the world. We will be speaking our own readings and also listening to and engaging readings from oppressed groups. We will look at the various ways these scriptures have been and continue to be interpreted—in text and media. Each day a text or texts will frame our discussion. We will be investigating “the ethics of reading” and how interpretive practices affect the world.

Course Objectives:

This semester we will be learning the basics of the scholarship of biblical studies, practicing different interpretive strategies, and creating dialogues around difference and diversity. We will be describing, applying, analyzing, critiquing, synthesizing, and evaluating the major reading strategies in biblical studies. By the end of this semester you will have a working knowledge of the basic historical critical methods of biblical interpretation and how these traditional methods are reinvented and/or deconstructed by and on the margins. You will be able to debate the central historical, cultural, ethical and political issues of biblical studies. And you will get experience in claiming and critiquing your own social location, while you practice deep listening of other voices. You will be able to articulate a number of different interpretive theories, while you formulate your own, well-researched and integrated opinion.

Course Texts:

Curtiss, Paul DeYoung, et al., eds. *The Peoples' Bible* (New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha). Fortress, 2008

Gomes, Peter J. *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*. HarperOne, 2002.

de la Torre, Miguel. *Reading the Bible from the Margins*. Orbis, 2002.

Sugirtharajah, R.S. *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*. 3rd Ed. Orbis, 2006.

Trible, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror*. Fortress, 1984.

And other assignments that will be on our course Moodle site.

Class Participation:

Since dialogue and discussion are central to our class community, it is essential for you to be present in class when you are well enough to attend. More than 3 absences will result in a lowering of your class participation grade. More than 8 absences result in failure of the course. Participation can take many forms, including but not limited to: attendance, active participation and leadership in your small group, participation in the larger class, and respect for your peers. Also, we will have a **Class Blog** (facilitated by Julianna Jones, with assistance by Shannon Yarbrough in the Writing Center). You are to share a minimum of **6** entries on the blog (about 1 blog every other week) and respond to **4** blogs during the semester. These blogs are ungraded but will count toward your class participation grade. To access the blog: go to www.wordpress.com; create your own account (at “sign up now”); send to Shannon Yarbrough (sryarbrough@agnesscott.edu) the email address you used to sign up and remind her that you’re in REL 115.

For an excellent overview of what a blog is, see:

http://codex.wordpress.org/Introduction_to_Blogging. For some “how to” tips on blogging, see: (<http://help.blogger.com/bin/topic.py?topic=8912>)

Assignments:

1. Teaching Opportunity: You will be working in teams (5-6 people) in a **20 minute oral presentation** of a specific topic (drawn the first day of class). You will bring in your own interpretations and make your own connections. The class will participate in grading each presentation. You are to hand out to the class a two-page summary of the topic, along with a one page annotated bibliography (both can be emailed to the professor for email distribution). Also, you are to make arrangements with the **Speaking Center** to have a tutor review your “dress rehearsal,” and you are to turn in a speaking center form signed by a tutor at the time of your presentation. Visuals and diversity of techniques are encouraged. You are to practice any media ahead of time. Groups will receive a group grade, so working cooperatively is imperative. See attached sheet of further guidelines.

2. Midterm exam: There will be study sheets provided and study sessions before this exam (short answer and essay format—intended for a 2-hr. time limit). The exam will be take-home; you will have one whole week to complete this exam (handed out **March 16** and due **March 23**).

3. Theory-Practice Learning: There is a requirement of 20 hours of experiential learning in which theory and practice will be linked. This option in this course can be counted toward the new Concentration in Religion and Social Justice in the Department of Religious Studies. The requirements included in this option are:

- For maximum of 12 students: 20 hours of a practicum experience, gained by working at the following locations:
 - ◆ *Hagar's House, a transitional shelter for homeless women and children, under Decatur Cooperative Ministries.* The experience will be setting up an afternoon tutoring program with the children, or working in the Tech Center (timeframe: 4:30 to 6 pm). OR: working with Project Take Charge at Belvedere United Methodist Church mornings from (a range of) 9 am-1 pm (includes helping to teach a four session class in financial budgeting, etc.). One overnight stay at Hagar's House is required (equals about ½ of the total hours of the practicum). **NOTE: There is a mandatory orientation session TBA at DCM** (counts toward the total hours).

Note: If too many of you are interested in this practicum option, interested students will need to write a 2-page (typed, double-spaced) proposal stating your reasons for applying for this option: due Thursday, 14 January.

◆The Open Door Community: Opportunities include volunteering in the soup kitchen; foot clinic; prison ministry (monthly trip to Milledgeville or Death Row Trip to Jackson, GA—Saturdays); worship and supper (Sundays at 4 pm); other hospitality ministries.

◆STRONG Sistas: a teen wo-mentoring program between ASC and Decatur High School. Requirements: being available to meet at bi-monthly Friday lunch sessions (12-2 pm) in Evans, being a peer one-to-one womentor, and tutoring. There will also be one overnight event at ASC.

- Participants will keep a journal of their experiences—and make connections to the biblical text and hermeneutical approaches and also the articles in the Open Door Reader (selections on Moodle)—to be handed in and presented on the last day of class. See attached guidelines.
- There will also be a midterm evaluation/check-in session and a final evaluation in class on the last day.
- Note: there are forms for the supervisors at each location to sign—and other materials—available in a separate packet.
- You may have another suggestion for a practicum site; if so, please confer with the professor.

4. Grading: out of a total of 100%:

Oral presentation with group (25%); midterm exam (25%); 20-hour practicum and reflective journal (30%); class participation (20%).

Any late papers will be counted 1/3 letter grade off for each late day (including weekends).

The grading scale is: A (100-92), A- (91-90), B+ (89-88), B (82-86). B- (82-80), C+ (79-78), C (77-72), C- (71-70), D+ (69-68), D (67-62), D- (61-60)

7. Safe Agnes Scott Sisters (SASS):

SASS is a student leadership group that emerged in the Department of Religious Studies in order to assist in creating “safe enough” and honorable spaces in the classroom. SASS helps us create a democratic classroom space in which we are mutually accountable to each other in the learning process. Our SASS representative will be working with you not only on evaluations (at midterm) but also on a syllabus review the second class day. She is also available at any time to discuss any questions or concerns that you don’t feel comfortable bringing to the professor, or to the Writing Center Tutor, or to other students. Conversations are held in confidence, but I will be alerted to any general or specific concerns as needed.

8. Films: There are two films in this course; I would like to show them at my house with dinner, or you can check them out of the library but I suggest you watch them in groups so that you’ll have discussion partners. Time and date on the “dinner and a movie” sessions TBA.

Course Schedule:

Tuesday, January 12	Introduction to the course and each other Setting Ground Rules for the course
Thursday, January 14	First part of class: SASS syllabus workshop; Second part: social location and the Bible Reading for today: in Gomes, “Apologia” and Chapter 1, “What’s It All About?”
Tuesday, January 19	Biblical Inspiration and Authority Reading for today: in Gomes, chs. 2 and 3, “A Matter of Interpretation” Visit by Beth Vann, Director of DCM (at 10:30)
Thursday, January 21	Bible Basics: Exploring the Biblical Terrain: geography, archeology, canon, texts Reading for today: <i>The Peoples’ Bible</i> , pp. 3-63 Visit by Shannon Yarbrough on the Blog
Tuesday, January 26	More Bible Basics Reading for today: <i>The Peoples’ Bible</i> , pp. 99-123

Thursday, January 28	Reading from the Margins de la Torre, ch. 1-2;
Tuesday, February 2	Group 1 Presents: Immigration Reading for Race and Class: Minority Hermeneutics Gomes, ch. 5; de la Torre, ch. 3
Thursday, February 4	The Politics of Omission Article TBA on Moodle
Tuesday, February 9	Antisemitism and the Bible Gomes, ch. 6
Thursday, February 11	Feminist Hermeneutics Reading for today: Gomes, ch. 7 The Book of Ruth
Tuesday, February 16	Feminist Hermeneutics Reading for today: de la Torre, ch. 4; Genesis 1-2
Thursday, February 18	Group 2 Presents: Slavery Feminist Hermeneutics: The Story of Hagar Trible, Introduction and ch. 1
Tuesday, February 23	Jewish Readings of the Tanak Guest Speaker: Rabbi Joshua Lesser
Thursday, February 25	Feminist Hermeneutics: The Story of Tamar Trible, ch. 2 <i>Midterm evaluation with Jenny Millkey</i>
Tuesday, March 2	Feminist Hermeneutics: The Story of Judges 19 Trible, ch. 3
Thursday, March 4	Feminist Hermeneutics: The Story of Jephthah Trible, ch. 4

March 8-12 is Spring Break	The Sexuality Debate Reading for today: Gomes, ch. 8
Tuesday, March 16	Queer Hermeneutics: The Story of David and Jonathan Guest Speaker: Prof. Randall Bailey of ITC <i>Midterm Exam handed out today in class—due at class time on March 23</i>
Thursday, March 18	Queer Hermeneutics Film: <i>For the Bible Told Me So</i> (Jenny Millkey from SASS will check in with us at the end of class)
Tuesday, March 23	Group 3 Presents: Gay Marriage Queering Esther Reading for Today: The Book of Esther; article by Randall Bailey (on Moodle)
Thursday, March 25	What Would Jesus Do? Reading for Today: The Gospel of Mark; The Peoples' Bible, pp. 65-84 Film: <i>Jesus of Montreal</i>
Tuesday, March 30	Group 4 Presents: The Ordination of Women What Would Paul Do? Reading for today: 1 Corinthians and Galatians; The Peoples' Bible, pp. 85-98
Thursday, April 1	Sex Workers and the Apocalypse: The Whore of Babylon Reading on Moodle
Tuesday, April 6	Postcolonial Hermeneutics Reading for today: Sugi, Part 1: articles by Sugirtharajah (2), Tamez, Weems
Thursday, April 8	Reading for today: Sugi, Part 2: Articles by Ahn, Soares-Prabhu, Murrell

Tuesday, April 13	Group 5 Presents: School of the Americas Reading for today: Sugi, Part 3: Articles by Pixley/Boff, Asian Group Work, Warrior
Thursday, April 15	Reading for today: Sugi, Part 4: Articles by Lee, Dube, Staley
Tuesday, April 20	Reading for today: Sugi, Part 5: Articles by Lorgunpai, Engineer, Rayan
Thursday, April 22	Reading for today: Sugi, Part 6: Articles by Mesters, A Nicaraguan Example, An Indonesian Example, Plaatjie
Tuesday, April 27: Last Day of Class	Presentations of Final Practicum Reflections
April 28-29: Reading Days	
April 29-May 5: Final Exams	

Other dates of note:

January 30/15th day of Shvat: Tu B'Shvat: The New Year for Trees

February 28: Purim (Esther 3:7)

March 30: Pesach or Passover (Ex. 12:23) [first seder on March 29)

April 2-4: Easter Break

April 11: Yom Ha-Shoah or Holocaust Remembrance Day

April 19: Yom Ha-Atzmaut or Israel Independence Day