Syllabus
Public Theology in the City
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
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**Course number (TBD): Public Theology in the City**
The practice of Public theology enables the faith community to engage in a disciplined theological analysis of a given context and a given social, political or economic issue so as to understand and appreciate the forces of good and evil in the public realm. The purpose of public theological analysis is to determine what action(s) the faith community needs to take in order to further the kingdom of God on earth. Public theology is a collaborative process best learned in the context of urban diversity where public concerns or issues are found. Together this class in partnership with The Second Baptist Church in Evanston, will learn the theory of public theology and practice the discipline of public theology that leads to a redemptive action.

**Credit:** 3 semester hours

**Faculty:**
- Dr. David Frenchak djfcam@sbcglobal.net
- Dr. Michael C.R. Nabors michael_nabors@msn.com
- Rev. Mark Dennis – community liaison

**Class Schedule:** (Fridays 1-9 pm; Saturdays 9am-3pm)
- September 11-12, 2015
- October 9-10, 2015
- November 13-14, 2015
- December 5 (4 hours)

**Course Agenda:**

Public Theology begins with an appreciation that God has an agenda for the world in which we live and God is active rather than passive in achieving that agenda. Public theology intentionally seeks the welfare of the public and the common good as it fits with God’s agenda. Accordingly, public theology often takes the agenda of the common good, or parts of it, as its own agenda, and seeks to offer distinctive and constructive insights from the treasury of faith to help in the building of a decent society, the restraint of evil, the curbing of violence and reconciliation in the public sphere. It strives to offer something that is distinctive, good news that transforms earthly society to the kingdom of God.

This class in public theology is a collaborative course in partnership with Pastor Rev. Dr. Michael Nabors, and the congregation of the Second Baptist Church of Evanston. Second Baptist Church brings a 132 year-old history, presence and activism in Evanston into the partnership. The predominately African American congregation possesses a deep-seated liberation theology motif that is clothed in its praise and worship, Christian Education and community outreach. Rev. Mark Dennis, Director of the McGaw YMCA, will serve as community liaison for the course. The Evanston YMCA was founded in 1885 and its objectives include promoting mental, moral, physical, and social welfare for everyone in the community. With more than ten thousand members, it serves 20,000 people in the community each year. The YMCA membership is a broad and diverse cross section of the community. Together we will do theological analyses, sociological analyses, political analyses...
and economic analyses that leads to action around the issue of racism in the community. The class and the learning agenda is open to members of the collaborating congregation as well as local non-profit leadership and local pastors seeking to learn and practice the skills of public theological analysis that lead toward action.

Course Overview

The call (vocation) to seek the welfare of the city invites religious leaders to the challenge and task of doing public theology. The hallmark of “public theology” is the insistence that the point of theological interpretation is not simply to contemplate, understand or comprehend the world, the city or the community as it is, but to contribute to God’s created order so that it moves closer to becoming what God intends that creation should be, as those intentions have been understood, accepted and embraced from scripture and the traditions of theistic faith.

Public theology assumes that theology should and does have a concrete contribution to make to the actual well being and transformation of the city. Public theology stands alongside classical theology, with its focus on knowing or contemplating the essence of things as they are, including the essence of God, and serves to actualize the prophetic reality of faith.

Public theology stands in the tradition of transformative theology which appreciates that reality is dynamic and therefore always changing either for the good or the evil. Transformative theology has indeed made a difference in the history of the Christian tradition. The descriptive title “public theology” signals intention to stress the transformational vocation of theology. Together the partners will focus on transformational theology that stresses the “correlational”, hermeneutical, critical and transformative character of doing theology.

This is a “correlational” method because it works by holding two things in reciprocal relationship—the vision and values of our religious traditions (“the city as is should be”) and the state of the actual world in which we live (“the city as it is”).

- It is a hermeneutical method because it recognizes and highlights the role of interpretation in reading our cities, our traditions and our scriptures.
- It is a critical method because it requires that we explicitly evaluate the inherited understandings (assumptions) that guide our interpretations and actions.
- Finally, it is a transformational method because its constant concern is to bring the city into greater harmony with the Creator’s intentions.

The process of “doing” public theology in this course includes three important and distinctive components and related skills:

- The pastoral theologian: Identifying streams of God’s activity in the public square and community
The prophetic theologian: Identifying social sin in the public square and community

The leader theologian: Engaging the principalities and powers to further the reign of God on earth in the pursuit of the common good in the public square and community

The disciplined rhythm of action-reflection by members of a community of faith is core to the practice of doing theology in context and may also be called contextual theology. It is at the center of the vocation to which individuals in urban ministry are called.

Course Objectives

1. Provide a working knowledge and understanding of public theology
2. Develop a workable process for doing public theology
3. Introduce skills of theological analysis for public theology
4. Do theological exegesis of community
5. Provide an opportunity to do public theology within an urban congregational and community context that leads to action

Required Texts

*Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates
*Doing Justice*, Dennis A. Jacobson
*Engaging the Powers*, Walter Wink; Fortress Press
*How To Think Theologically*, Howard W. Stone & James O. Duke; Fortress Press
*The Politics of Jesus*, Obery Hendricks; Doubleday
*Urban Ministry*, Ronald E. Peters; Abingdon Press

Secondary Reading

*God in Public*, Mark G. Toulouse; Westminster John Knox Press

Class Topics and Structure

Class session I
September 11-12

The Art of Public Theology

Assigned Reading

How to Think Theologically,
*Between the World and Me* : (Students should have read both texts prior to the beginning of class September 11).

Class overview:
• Introductions and community building
• Syllabus overview
• Class research project
• Introduction to public theology
• Introduction to the church and community
• The priestly theologian: Identifying streams of God’s activity in community
• Action: community visits
• Theological reflection
• The prophetic theologian: Identifying social sin
• Action: Community visits
• Theological reflection
• Organizing for the class project
  o Theological research teams
  o Setting goals and objectives
  o Communication system
  o Timeline

Research assignment

Class session 2
October 9-10

Assigned Readings:

- The Politics
  of Jesus;
Ministry

Class overview:

• The strategic theologian: Jesus as strategist
• Action: community visits
• Reflection
• Domination systems vs. domination free system
• Action: community visits
• Reflection
• Review of research
  o Theological team reports
• Thinking theologically about the research

Class session 3
Nov. 13-14

Assigned Reading:

Doing Justice
Engaging the Powers

• The world as it is
The world as it should be
Engaging the public arena
Congregation-based community organizing
Power
Self interest
Agitation

Class 4
December 5

The final class session will include a public action and/or presentation followed by theological reflection on that action

Course Assignments and Due Dates

In this course you will work collaboratively toward the final grade. 60% of your grade will be a collective grade. All students will receive the same grade for the research project and action and also for the team paper. There will be a final exam that is individually graded.

Student attendance & participation: 20% total course grade (individual grade)
Participatory research project and action: 30% total course grade (collective)
Team paper: 30% total course grade (collective)
Final exam 20% (individual)

Student participation: It will be helpful if participants in this course do not see the course through the lens of the typical college and seminary classroom experience. The educational theories of adult learning and experiential learning inform both the classroom and the course structure. It is understood and accepted that we learn as much from each other and from experience as we do from a book or professor. While attendance at all class sessions is essential due to the intensive time frame of the class sessions there may be a need to schedule short class times for reflection and decision making regarding the class project. Additionally, students will be working in teams that will require community visits and research time outside of class schedule. Students are required to actively participate in the class discussions of the readings, the work of the participatory research project, the writing of team papers and preparing for the public presentation of the research.

Participatory research project: We will be doing public theology in partnership with the Second Baptist Church around a specific public issue or concern troubling the quality of life in the community. To do this well, it will be necessary for students to engage in research that resources the action the church would like to take to address this issue. Such research is usually identified as “Participatory Action Research” This research will replace the usual library research found in most academic courses.

Team paper: This is a written assignment completed by the class as a theological team. The paper, a reflection on the process of the project of doing theology in community will include:

1. Introduction: An overview of the community
2. Reflection of God’s presence and activity in the community.
3. A reflection on understanding of a social sin in the community.
4. Stories from victims of the social sin
5. Where you experience and see hope?
6. Where and how did you experience the principalities and powers?
7. Where else did or does this sin evidence its self and what is the churches response.
8. What was it like to find and partner with others in the community to oppose the social sin? Who were they?
9. Using prophetic imagination, what is your vision for the future re this situation?
10. What further action(s) do you recommend?
11. What is the potential for redemption look like in regard to the common good?
12. Conclusion: A collective and descriptive articulation re what you have learned and how you will apply this learning to ministry.

Paper should include a title page with all pertinent and descriptive information about the paper including name of course, date, school, name of writers and paper title. This information should be centered on the title page. Paper should be written as a story and not as an academic thesis or report and may include pictures, double spaced with pages numbered. The recommended length of the paper is twelve to fifteen pages.

The primary audience for this paper is the congregation and staff of participating church and the community it serves. The paper will also be made available for residents of Evanston and to churches in other cities attempting to work with the same or similar issue. Papers should be emailed to: michael_nabors@msn.com and to djfcam@sbcglobal.net A bound copy is to be given to the partnering Church. Keep both electronic and hard copies of your assignments as a reference.

Grading Scale for Graduate Credit:
98-100% of points possible = A+
94-97% = A
90-93 = A-
87-89% = B+
83-86% = B
80-82% = B-
77-79% = C+
73-76% = C
70-72% = C-
65 69% = D

Academic Policies:

- Please note that Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary’s policies pertaining to academic honor, drop/add procedures, process to apply for extension on assignments and grade appeal should be followed by students enrolled in this class.

- In order to respect the learning community, we will agree to

  ✓ Turn off cell phones
✓ Refrain from surfing the internet, emailing and texting during class sessions and community visits.

Bibliography


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Brueggemann, Walter. Journey to the Common Good, WJK, 2010


Dayton, Donald W. and Strong, Douglas M. Rediscovering an Evangelical History: A Tradition and Trajectory of Integrating Piety and Justice, Baker Academic, 2014

Etioni, Amitoi, ed. Civic Repentance. Lanham MD: Rasamann & Littlefield Publisher, 1999

Fluker, Walter, They Looked for a City, UPA, 1989


McMickle, Marvin A. *Pulpit and Politics, Separation of Church and State in the Black Church*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2014

McMickle, Marvin A. *Where Have All The Prophets Gone*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2006

Mouw, Richard J. *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*, Eerdmans, 2002

Perkinson, James W. *Messianism Against Christology: Resistance Movements, Folk Arts and Empire (New Approaches to Religion and Power)*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2013


