

THE PEOPLE'S SEMINARY / REGENT COLLEGE

Revised August 10, 2006

BIBL 519: READING THE BIBLE WITH THE DAMNED

Dr. Bob Ekblad

Fall, 2006

Weekend School (Sept 15-16; Oct 13-14; Nov 17-18)

3 graduate credit hours

Maximum Enrolment: 50

Lodging and breakfast will be provided for \$25.00 per day at the Benson Farmstead Bed and Breakfast in Burlington or lodging alone for \$10 per night for a limited number at New Earth Refuge in Laonner -- other meals at or near The People's Seminary.

Course Description

This Weekend School course will take place at The People's Seminary in the Skagit Valley of Washington State, 1½ hours South of Vancouver. The People's Seminary is a theological reflection and training center tied to New Earth - Tierra Nueva, (an ecumenical ministry to Mexican migrant farm workers and other immigrants), and to Skagit County Jail Ministry—which serves inmates, ex-offenders and their families. Immigrants, ex-offenders, gang members and other marginalized people will participate in the course, sharing from their life experiences and ongoing struggles.

The objective of this course is to develop a Biblical, theological and pastoral framework for a ministry of presence and proclamation to people who assume they are rejected by God. This assumption is based on a complex web of life experiences including poverty, misfortune, neglect or abuse from parents and/or exclusion from the dominant culture and from the church because of race, social class or anti-social behaviour. The instructor's primary experience comes out of over twenty-five years of reading the Bible with people who often consider themselves "damned" – Central American peasants, Mexican migrant farm workers, inmates in Washington State jails, drug dealers, gang members.

Popular, street-level images of God and life will first be explored through required reading and lectures. How do many inmates, immigrants, gang members and drug addicts view God? What are the barriers that keep today's most obvious "sinners" from believing the gospel? After exploring the context of today's underclass, the following topics will be studied.

The course will explore the hermeneutical, theological and pastoral issues related to Scripture study, evangelism, and the celebration of the Sacraments with people who feel excluded from the church and society and rejected by God. The course will consist of lectures and discussion that will include a survey of the Biblical messages addressed to the marginalized (slaves, exiles, tax-collectors and sinners, etc.) throughout the scriptures, exegetical study of some of these key texts, and discussion of the specific content and function of Biblical and theological concepts and doctrines such as the Trinity, creation, fall, sin, redemption, call, covenant, judgement, exile,

salvation, liberation, healing; unclean/clean—cleansing; demon-possession—deliverance; landlessness—landedness; this life—the afterlife and others. The course will also include practical teaching on effective ways to lead Bible studies, worship and other spiritual direction to marginalized people. There will also be a focus on hearing the voice of God while preparing and leading dialogical Bible studies.

Course Outline

September 15-16 After examining the dominant images of God found among people on the margins and the mainstream we will explore strategies for reading Scripture that help people discover for themselves news that brings light and life into their diverse contexts. The first weekend will focus on strategies for reading select texts from the Pentateuch freshly that deliberately place texts and contemporary life contexts side by side. The affects of hermeneutical factors such as social location, race, class and reading community on interpretation will be explored. How might today’s “damned” challenge our theological categories such as creation, fall & redemption in Gen.1-4 and salvation and liberation from oppression in Exodus?

October 13-14 This second weekend will explore approaches to reading selections from the Prophets and Writings that offer Good News to people on the margins. How do the messages of the prophets differ according to addresses? Other topics addressed include: Images of God as doctor/healer; studying and praying the Psalter with people on the margins.

November 17-18 The final weekend will focus on reading the Gospels and Epistles for Good News. How do we follow Jesus through the grammar of the Gospels, learning the distinctives of each of his many actions (salvation, healing, cleansing, touching, casting out, forgiving...). What message is addressed to whom by Jesus, Paul and other speakers and writers? What is the function of judgment and law in Paul’s writings and in today’s world? How can apocalyptic and eschatological texts best be read with people on the margins? What might a Biblical theology for today’s exiles look like? The last weekend will include practical guidelines for reading the Bible with the “damned”.

Academic Requirements and Time Investment

	<u>3 cr hrs</u>
Lectures	36 hrs
Reading (1050 pp)	53 hrs
Term Paper (4000-4500 words)	38 hrs
Book Reviews (2 @ 500 words)	<u>8 hrs</u>
TOTAL	135 hrs

***Assignments:***

**1. Required Reading & Book Reviews.**

Students will be required to read in preparation for each class and write two book reviews (500 words each) on 3 of the required texts, other than *In Search of Respect or Machete Season*. Students will be expected to participate in class discussion and be prepared for an occasional quiz on required reading.

**1st Book Review DUE: Oct 13/06**  
**2nd Book Review DUE: Nov.17/06**

**2. Term Paper.**

A 4000-4500 word term paper, integrating exegesis of a particular Biblical text with reflections on hermeneutics in the light of the required reading. **DUE: Dec. 15/06**

**REGISTRAR'S NOTE:**

**Extensions** for course work are granted only in cases where the student demonstrates there was an unforeseeable and unavoidable emergency. The extension policy and application forms may be found at Reception or on the Schedules & Forms page of the College website <[www.regent-college.edu](http://www.regent-college.edu)>. Extensions may be granted, at the discretion of the professor, up to 7 days beyond the end of the term. Extensions beyond that must be applied for through the Registrar's Office. The deadline for making an application is the last day of the term.

Evaluation

Book Reviews	30 % (2 @ 15 %)
Term Paper	70 %

Bibliography

***Required Reading:***

Bob Ekblad, *Reading the Bible with the Damned*, Westminster John Knox: Louisville, 2005.

Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*, Sheffield Academic Press: Sheffield, 1999 (170 pp)

Mark and Patti Virkler, *Dialogue with God: Opening the door to 2-way prayer*, (Gainsville: Bridge-Logos, 1986).

Steve Thompson, *You May All Prophesy! Practical Guidelines for Prophetic Ministry*, Morningstar Publications: Wilkesboro, 2000.

Jean Hatzfeld and Susan Sontag, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, trans. Linda Coverdale, Farrar, Strans & Giroux: New York, 2005.

Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Second Edition, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003 (403 pp)

William Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*, Third Edition, Word Books: Waco, 1979 (156 pp).

***Recommended Reading:***

Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: the Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2004.

Elijah Anderson, *The Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City*, W. W. Norton & Co: New York, 1999 (352 pp)

James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 1985

Mark D. Baker, *Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace and Freedom*, InterVarsity: Downers Grove, 1999 (100 pp)

Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies*, Westminster/John Knox Press: Louisville, 1989

Stanley P. Saunders and Charles L. Campbell, *The Word on the Streets: Performing the Scriptures in the Urban Context*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. (192 pp)

Gerald West, *A Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, Orbis, 1996