

SYLLABUS

COURSE TITLE: THEOLOGY ON THE EDGE: TOWARDS A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR TODAY'S EXILES

DATE: March 12-15, 2002

INSTRUCTOR: Bob Ekblad

Bob Ekblad lives in the Skagit Valley, Washington with his wife Gracie and three children Isaac, Luke and Anna. Bob is a Presbyterian pastor working as executive director of Tierra Nueva and The People's Seminary—an ecumenical ministry to Hispanic immigrants and training center in Biblical the theological studies. Bob also works as chaplain of Skagit County Jail Ministry. Bob and Gracie worked for six years doing sustainable agricultural development in Honduras in the 80s. Bob has a ThD in Old Testament from the Institut Protestant de Théologie in Montpellier, France and teaches at The People's Seminary in Burlington and as sessional lecturer at Regent College.

DESCRIPTION:

This course will take place at The People's Seminary in the Skagit Valley of Washington State, 1 hour North of Seattle. The People's Seminary is a theological reflection and training center tied to 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. Theology on the Edge: Towards a Biblical Theology for Today's Exiles will help students develop a Biblical, theological and pastoral framework for a ministry of presence and proclamation to people on the margins of society and church. People whose lives are marked by suffering, poverty and social exclusion often perceive that 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 years of reading the Bible with people who often consider themselves "damned" – Central American peasants, Mexican migrant farm workers, inmates in Washington State jails and immigration prisons, 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, drug addicts and other contemporary exiles 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.

OBJECTIVES

The course will explore the hermeneutical, theological and pastoral issues related to Scripture study and the celebration of the Word and 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—expulsion; 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.

Lodging and breakfast will be provided for \$25.00 per day at the Benson Farmstead Bed and Breakfast in Burlington. Other meals will be had at or near The People's Seminary.

OVERVIEW OF TOPICS TO BE COVERED

- Session 1 The challenge to develop a grace-filled theology: Responding to contemporary street-level images of God with life-trying "Good News."
- Session 2 Hermeneutical issues related to Scripture study at the margins
- Session 3 New beginnings require new readings: new approaches to creation, fall & redemption in Gen.1-4
- Session 4 Salvation as liberation from oppression in Exodus and in today's world.
- Session 5 Sin as sickness and God as doctor/healer in the Bible
- Session 6 Proclamation to power & to the exiles: judgment, revelation and redemptive suffering in Isaiah
- Session 7 Worship as truth telling before God: Reading and praying the Psalms in exile
- Session 8 Jesus' mode of liberation: salvation, healing, cleansing, touching, expelling and forgiveness in the NT
- Session 9 Understanding the place of law and judgment in the Scriptures & world
- Session 10 Awaiting the Coming One: Apocalyptic hope and Eschatological expectation
- Session 11 Towards a Biblical theology for today's exiles

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE

- a. Students will be expected to participate in class discussion and be prepared for an occasional quiz on required reading.
- b. Read books on the Required Reading List and then choose from the Recommended Reading List, to complete your specific assignment. (D.Min. = 1400-1600 pages and MTS = 1000-1200 pages).
- c. For each book you read, please type a one-page, single-spaced synopsis giving evidence of your comprehension of the book and showing **constructively critical interaction with the author and his writing**. This synopsis should include the following:

- 1) Provide a brief description of the book's theme and basic subject matter (do not recite the Table of Contents).
- 2) Give an analysis of the book's strengths and weaknesses.
- 3) Discuss your recommendations for future usage of this book at the school.
- 4) Discuss the book's potential for ministry enhancement in your ministry.

Course Project

Research and write an 18-20 page term paper, integrating exegesis of a particular Biblical text with an analysis of some of the forces of sin/oppression affecting a character(s) in *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-city neighborhood*. Term

REQUIRED READING:

James Alison, *Raising Abel: The Recovery of the Eschatological Imagination*, Crossroad: New York, 2000, **197 pages**.

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

David Simon & Edward Burns, *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-city Neighborhood*, New York: Broadway Books, 1997, **535 pages**.

Anthony W. Bartlett, *Cross Purposes: The Violent Grammar of Christian Atonement*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 2001, **263 pages**.

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

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

RECOMMENDED READING:

J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2001. **228 pages**

Gerald G. May, *Addiction and Grace*, San Francisco: Harper, 1991, **181 pages**.

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

James Gilligan's *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*, Vintage Random House: New York, 1997, **267 pages**

Cathrine Mowry Lacugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, Harper San Francisco, 1991, **417 pages**.

Gerald O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, Orbis: Maryknoll, 1996, **340 pages**.

COURSE GRADING

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