

# The People's Seminary

## Troublesome Texts and Worn-out Stories, Re-reading the Bible for Good News

Bob Ekblad & Jonathan Draper

Fall 2003

November 18-20, 9:00-5:00PM

The People's Seminary

3 Credit Hours

### Course Description

Every interpreter of Scripture has a theological perspective that prizes certain Biblical texts and interpretations and has difficulties with others. At the same time there are many Biblical texts that are so familiar that they cease to surprise and communicate anything fresh and challenging. Difficult texts and worn-out stories vary from one interpreter to another depending on their theology and interpretive approach. What is a troublesome text for one might provide needed support for another. A worn-out story for one person may breathe new life into another. Yet there are many texts that are particularly “toxic” to people on the margins of society. Those who lead Bible studies, preach or in any way minister with marginalized people (inmates, drug users, the homeless, gay/lesbian/transgender, or anyone submerged in a context of oppression), and those who work with the mainstream are invited to come to struggle together to read troublesome texts and worn-out stories for Good News. Students are invited to come prepared with their own list of difficult and dull texts. It is clearly impossible in one course to find good news in every “bad news” Biblical text or resurrect every “dead” one. This course will present strategies for facing both the dark and the dull places of the Bible by examining numerous texts. South African New Testament scholar Prof. Jonathan Draper will present NT texts while The People's Seminary instructor Bob Ekblad will present Old Testament interpretations.

The course follows naturally from TPS' Real World Theology: Assumptions for Reading the Bible as Good News.

### Class Outline

#### TROUBLESOME TEXTS

1. Can judgment be good news? Reading with all the lives not safe inside Noah's Ark.
2. Is God punishing his servant instead of us in Isaiah 53?
3. The Female Body as City: the powerful woman as whore and the passive woman as bride in Revelation 17:1-18 (compare 2:18-29; 12:1-16; 18:1-24; 21:9-14).
4. The Mark of the Beast: On Whose Forehead? Revelation 13:11-18 (compare 18:1-24; 19:20; 20:4; 21:8; 21:27; 22:11, 15).
5. Christian Jihad: Theodicy or Human Legitimation of Vengeance? Revelation 6:1-16 (compare 8-20; esp. 19).

1. **Genesis 1:1-3** Un-burying “In the beginning” Bob Ekblad
2. **Exodus 20:1-17** Dancing with the Decalogue. Bob Ekblad
3. **Matthew 1:1-25** God and the Ancestors: Scary Skeletons in a Nazareth Family Cupboard. Jonathan Draper
4. **Luke 17:11-19** A Question of Miracles and Gratitude or of Solidarity and Selfishness? Jonathan Draper
5. **Luke 16:19-31** Rich Man and Poor Lazarus: Why was the beggar outside the gate? Jonathan Draper

### **Academic Requirements and Time Investment**

1. Students are expected to come prepared with a list of their most troublesome texts & worn-out stories with brief descriptions of why these passages cause them difficulty or no longer surprise them.
2. Students are required to write a 15-20 page paper presenting an exegesis of either their most troublesome Biblical text or least interesting “worn-out” story.
3. Students are required to turn in three two-page book reviews on books of their choice from the required reading list.

Lectures	24 hrs
Presentation	10 hrs
Final paper	40 hrs
One-page paper critiques	16 hrs
Required reading	<u>45 hrs</u>
 Total	 135 hrs

### **Evaluation**

By letter grade, on the basis of weekly class preparation, participation, presentations and final paper.

### **Bibliography**

#### **1. Required Reading**

J. A. Draper, “Old Scores and New Notes: Where and What is Contextual Exegesis in the New South Africa” in M. Speckman, *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001, 148-168.

J. A. Draper, “Reading the Bible as Conversation: A Theory and Methodology for Contextual Interpretation of the Bible in Africa”, *Grace and Truth* 19/2, 2002, 12-24.

#### **BIBL : Troublesome Texts and Worn-out Stories – Draper & Ekblad - Page 2 of 4**

Alden Thompson, *Who’s Afraid of the Old Testament God?* Australia: Exeter, The Paternoster Press, 1988.

## **A. Troublesome Texts Reading**

E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, "The Words of the Prophecy: Reading the Apocalypse Theologically" in Steve Moyise, *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, 19-19. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001.

Alison Jack, "Out of the Wilderness: Feminist Readings on the Book of Revelation" in Moyise, *Studies*, 149-162.

Barbara R. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International.

J. N. Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.

R. Bauckham, "The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation 18", in R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation*, 338-383. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993.

Richard Bauckham, "The Apocalypse as a Christian War Scroll", in R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation*, 210-237. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993.

A. Y. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984 (esp. pp. 84-140).

A. Y. Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation", *Harvard Theological Review* 79:1-3 (1986) 308-320.

E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Redemption as Liberation (Revelation 1:5-6 and 5:9-10) in E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation : Justice and Judgement*, 68-81. Philadelphia: Fortress.

E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

## **B. Worn out stories**

Nyamiti, Charles 1989. "African Christologies Today". In J. N. K. Mugambi, *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*. Nairobi, Kenya: Initiatives, 17-39.

Dickson, K. A. 1984. "The Theology of the Cross in Context". In K. A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 185-199.

## **BIBL : Troublesome Texts and Worn-out Stories – Draper & Ekblad - Page 3 of 4**

Draper, J. A. 1996. "'Was there no-one left to give glory to God except this foreigner?' Breaking the Boundaries in Luke 17:11-19" in L. Hulley, L. Pato & L. Kretzschmar (eds.), *Where are we*

going? *Life and Faith in the New South Africa: Festschrift for Desmond Tutu*, Pretoria: Human & Rousseau, 222-229.

De Gruchy, S. 2000. "How then shall we be saved? AIDS, community and redemption". *Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Africa* 7/1, 18-20.

Douglas, Mary 1971. "Deciphering a Meal". In C. Geertz (ed), *Myth Symbol and Culture*. New York: Norton.

Draper, J. A. 2003. "The Geography of the Dinner Table and Human Values". *Natal Witness*, May 3.

## **2. Recommended Reading**

James Alison, *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay*, New York: Crossroad, 2001.

James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes*, New York: Crossroad, 1998.