

Latin American Liberation Theology
RLG 274; M/W, 2:20 – 3:30 and additional time for service learning TBA, Main Comen 201

Instructor: Dr. Kelly Denton-Borhaug

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Office Hours: Monday, 4-6; Thursday, 2-3 PM

You may also email or phone me to set up an office appointment; please do come by at least once during the semester!

Course Description: What is “liberation theology?” To quote Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the founders of liberation theology: “Liberation theology is closely bound up with this new presence of those who in the past were always absent from our history. They have gradually been turning into active agents of their own destiny and beginning a resolute process that is changing the condition of the poor and oppressed of this world” (*A Theology of Liberation*, xxi). In this course we will examine the history, method and content of liberation theology in the Latin American context as “critical theological reflection on action.” We will closely study an anthology outlining classic themes of liberation theology in the Latin American context, *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology*, edited by Daniel G. Groody, and as well delve into texts, film and experience to focus on a few specific contexts (El Salvador, Chile, and the Lehigh Valley), and to investigate how this movement emerged and the effects it continues to have socially, politically, religiously and personally. The focus of our study will be on deep understanding of the arguments and themes of our writers, and exploration with and service to and with the Latino community in the Lehigh Valley -- our own “praxis,” as we attempt an embodied understanding of liberation theology’s method and goals.

Service Learning Component

Option One

We will be developing a new relationship between Moravian College and the Lehigh Valley Latino Leadership Alliance. Specifically, we will work with Latino high school students in our area who are preparing to apply for a college scholarship through the LLA in a program called “Si Se Puede!” Moravian students will work with students on financial aid and narrative elements of this process. In addition we will make ourselves available to help operate a “Mini-Health Day” during March, which is Latino Health Month, in Allentown with the St. Luke’s Health Star Van. Your Service Learning Component is no less than 20 hours over the course of the semester. I am hopeful that a student in our course will be willing to take on the task of scheduling and keeping track of student hours in this component of our work together.

Option Two

Students also may work with the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley on one of two projects: a) assisting with an afterschool or evening computer workshop with teachers of the CACLV and elementary – high school students of South Bethlehem (about 60 to 75% of these are Latino students), or b) assisting with the Tax Preparation Assistance Service to help people in the community fill out their tax forms (these will largely be individuals whose incomes are about 5K or so).

Course Objectives

- 1) Students will achieve an introductory understanding of liberation theology in the context of Latin America, and the cultural, religious/spiritual and political realities and influences that created a likely terrain for its emergence, as well as an introductory understanding of the challenges facing the adherents of liberation theology today.
- 2) Not only will they gain an intellectual understanding, students also will be exposed to a practical service-learning arena for praxis, “theology in action,” and thus have the opportunity to learn from the juxtaposition of classroom and extra-classroom application.
- 3) Students will increase their skills in reading complex texts, writing and critical thinking.
- 4) Students will deepen their understanding and awareness of local members of the Lehigh Valley community who are of Latin American heritage, and will have the opportunity to compare and contrast what they learn about liberation theology in Chile and El Salvador with contemporary challenges, hopes and achievements of our own local Latin American community.

Course Requirements:

- 1) Prompt attendance Mondays and Wednesdays, having carefully read the assigned texts, ready to deeply engage with one another in discussion and debate. I want you to work on reconstructing the argument or “plot” of each reading, to see how the ideas hang together and build toward conclusions; and be ready to present your ideas in class discussion. (20% of final grade) Serious illness or family emergency is the only acceptable reasons for missing class, and must be cleared with me via email or phone in advance of the missed class. Your attendance requirement also includes your energetic, engaged and enthusiastic participation in the service learning component of our course, keeping track of the time you spend and most importantly, *paying attention* to what you see, hear, experience.
- 2) Each Wed. a 3 page double-spaced reflection paper is due at the beginning of class. These papers are meant to help you integrate your reading, class films and discussion and our service learning. You’ll be given questions and/or themes each week. Be concise and clear in these typewritten, hard-copy papers, equally forceful in your demonstration of grappling with the depth of this material and your own response, questions and experience in concert with your study. (40%)
- 3) Each student will sign up for one class session to orally present the “reconstructed argument” of a separate example of liberation theology (a book of your own choice) in a 15-minute presentation (more details to be given in class). You will evaluate your peers and be evaluated by them in this part of our course. (10%)
Note: Your book should be connected to the Library of Congress heading, “liberation theology.” If it isn’t, please have me approve your choice. You need not choose something specifically in Reeve’s library, though you may if you wish. Give yourself time to search far and wide, since there are many many titles and examples from diverse cultures, ethnicities, nations, races, etc.
- 4) A final 7- 10 page, double-spaced paper accompanying your book review that will compare and contrast the argument of the book you reviewed with our course reading and films, class learning, service learning and your own experience and growth in reflection and praxis. (30%)

Required Texts

The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology, Ed. Daniel G. Groody

Where Is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope, Jon Sobrino

A Day of Life, Manilo Argueta

Any other assigned articles/chapters during the semester; these will most likely be on reserve in Reeve's Library. You are responsible for checking them out long enough to make your own copy, and for bringing that same copy with you to class when assigned. Thank you! ☺

Required Films

"Romero," Paulist Pictures, Los Angeles, CA, Vidmark Entertainment, 1990

"Missing," Universal Studios, 1982

Paper Use Policy for this course

In order to promote more responsible and sustainable use of paper, in this course we will adopt two practices.

First, please change the set margins in your computer: Here's how to do it on your own. It should take no more than twenty seconds and just a few clicks of the mouse. On your WORD screen, go to FILE, then PAGE SET UP. Once on PAGE SET UP, click the DEFAULT key, and you'll be offered "Do you want to change the default settings for the page set up? This change will affect all new documents based on the normal template." Then set your margins to whatever preferred new width you'd like. I'm suggesting setting each margin to .75" which will save an immense amount of paper.

Second, please a) use double-sided printing *or* b) print with used paper (make sure you x-out the pre-used side of your paper). Thank you!

Week One

Monday, Jan. 14

Introduction to our course

Wed. Jan. 16

Read: Jeffrey Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America*, pp 1-19 **On reserve in Reeve's – make your own copy and bring to class**

Groody, pp 1-13

Week Two

Monday, Jan. 21 No class for MLK holiday; however, please note that you have reading assigned!

Read: Klaiber, "Chile" pp 42-65 Also read: [Chile, 9/11/73](#). By: Kornbluh, Peter. Nation, 9/29/2003, Vol. 277 Issue 9, p19-23, 3p, 1bw; (find this through Reeve's library databases; make your own copy and bring to class

Wed. Jan. 23

Read: Groody, Chapter One

In class: Renee' Saleh, Volunteer Leader with the Latino Leadership Alliance of Lehigh Valley, will be with us to discuss our service learning component for the semester.

Over the weekend: You are responsible for viewing the film, “Missing” –I suggest you work with others in the class to arrange convenient viewing times in the evening on Friday or Saturday nights!

****Important Note!! Jan. 23 and Jan. 24 “Si, Se Puede!” Workshops in Bethlehem and Allentown – you are required to attend one of these as an observer.**

Week Three

First Reflection Paper due at beginning of class

Questions for Reflection Paper #1

Now that you’ve begun to dip into the themes of Liberation Theology in the Latin American context, how would you characterize what it is? What are its goals? What do you understand at this point regarding its method? What is it responding to? What do the film “Missing” and the historical material from Klaiber about the context of Chile add to your understanding? What role does the U.S. play in the realities giving rise to the emergence of liberation theology?

Monday, Jan. 29

Read: Groody, Chapters Two and Three

Wed., Jan. 30

Read: Argueta, from beginning up to “7 am”

Week Four

Questions for Reflection Paper #2

Discuss and relate the themes emerging from Groody and Argueta – how do these two books inform one another? What is the portrait of Christianity you see emerging, and how is that portrait similar and/or different from that which you have experienced in popular Christianity in the U.S.?

Monday, Feb. 4

Read Groody, Chapters Four and Five

Wed., Feb. 6

Read Argueta, up to “10:30 am” and Klaiber, “El Salvador”

Week Five

Question for Reflection Paper #3

Summarize the arguments in the two Chapters you read in Groody this week. Reflect on the connections you are struck by in Groody, Argueta and Klaiber. Relate all this material to your beginning impressions and awareness emerging from your service learning.

Monday, Feb. 11

Read Groody, Chapters Six and Seven

In Class: Begin viewing *Romero*

Wed. Feb. 13

Read Argueta, up to “12 noon”

Before the week ends: finish your viewing of Romero (again, I encourage class members to do this in groups, perhaps over the weekend, allowing time to talk about your reactions to the film after you finish viewing it!)

Week Six

Question for Reflection Paper #4

What have you learned about “the option for the poor” thus far in your study of Groody? How is Romero’s life connected to developing awareness of the significance of this theme in Christianity? Compare and contrast the authors we have read thus far on this theme. Why is it central to liberation theology?

Monday, Feb. 18

Read: Groody, Chapters Eight and Nine

Wed. Feb. 20

Read: Argueta – finish it!

Week Seven

Question for Reflection Paper #4

Argueta was forced into exile by the Salvadoran government after writing this book. Having finished the novel, reflect on the dynamics behind such an action. What is the meaning of this work of fiction? Why do you think Argueta wrote it? Connect the themes from Groody, Chapters Eight and Nine, with those from the end of this fictional account. What do you make of this material?

Monday, Feb. 25

Read: Groody, Chapters 10, 11 and 12

Wed., Feb. 27

Read: Groody, Chapters 13 and 14

Reflection paper #5 due in professor’s office box by Friday, Feb. 29, before you leave for spring break!!

Questions: Write about three main themes in Groody that have most impacted you over the course of your study of this book. Why did these themes make you sit up and think? How have you been impacted? In some way connect these themes to your experience thus far in your service learning. Describe (briefly!) what you have done, what you have learned, and the questions that are emerging along the way.

Week Eight

No Class; Spring Break

Over spring break: decide upon the book you wish to review, present orally to the class, and include in your final course paper. We will share titles on the Monday of our return to school.

Week Nine

No reflection paper due this week!

Monday, Mar. 9

Read: Sobrino, Prologue, Introduction, Chapter One

In class: Be ready to share the book you plan to review, plus the rationale for having chosen this particular example of liberation theology.

Wed., Mar. 12

Read: Sobrino, Chapters Two and Three

Special note: I am purposefully leaving open the remainder of the semester's syllabus and we will fill it out together as we go. We will finish reading the Sobrino Book, take time to integrate what you are learning through Service Learning, and also make time for students to present their book reviews. The purpose behind this openness is to take advantage of opportunities and unexpected issues that are like to surface as we delve more into the service learning aspect of our course.

Week Ten

Monday, Mar. 17

Wed., Mar. 19

Week Eleven

Monday, Mar. 24 Book Reviews

Wed., Mar. 26

Week Twelve

Monday, Mar. 31 Book Reviews

Wed., April 2

Week Thirteen

Monday, April 7 Book Reviews

Wed., April 9

Week Fourteen

Monday, April 14 Book Reviews

Wed., April 16

Week Fifteen

Monday, April 21 Book Reviews

Wed., April 23

Week Sixteen

Monday, April 28

