

CL 8530: Gospel and Cultures

Fall 2002
Fridays, 9:00 to 12:30 pm
NW 142

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This course explores the interwoven nature of the divine and human narratives. Specific topics of study include identity construction and maintenance, and the embodiment of faith in ritual practices. Students contextualize their own appropriation of gospel narratives in specific cultural locations, and consider diverse performances of the gospel across many cultural settings. Focused attention is given to the crucial role of story construction and propagation in practices of leadership within Christian community. Primary conversation partners are anthropology, cultural studies, and contemporary theological approaches to culture and tradition

Course goals:

- Develop a working vocabulary and set of exploratory tools from within anthropology, ritual and cultural studies, and contemporary theology for adequately describing and investigating contemporary religious traditions as embedded in specific living communities.
- Learn how to access and read the scholarly journals of a particular field of study, and to develop familiarity with their paper submission protocols.
- Collaborate with colleagues on learning how to teach new materials.
- Problematize your own specific locations and narratives within "cultures" and "gospel."
- Develop a familiarity with the ideas and concerns that cluster around the issue of "gospel and cultures," particularly as related to congregational leadership. Use that familiarity to situate yourself within a particular scholarly discourse, and then investigate that discourse for its utility in supporting congregational mission.

Course requirements:

- Attend all of the class sessions. Please note: life often poses many challenges to participating fully in a class. This course has been structured to meet only once a week, so as to make it possible for commuting students to attend more easily. But this format also makes it difficult, if you miss a session, to engage the whole of the learning envisioned by the syllabus. I hope that you will make every effort possible to be with us. I also hope that you will feel invited to bring your children with you, particularly if otherwise you would have to miss the session (as I will, if I have days when my children are sick and I can't find a babysitter). Please notify me if you will not be able to be present in class.

- Prepare and present one of the sets of required texts for a particular week at least once during the term. You will sign up for this at the first session of the class. Work off of the guidelines suggested in Appendix One, but please feel free to be as creative as you can be.
- Find, choose, and follow a year's worth of issues from at least one scholarly journal that covers the kinds of questions and themes we will be addressing in this course. I will ratify your choice of journal on a "first come, first served" basis, so the sooner you identify a journal, the more likely you are to be able to use it for this assignment. I expect that you will weave ideas from the journals into the conversation of the course throughout the semester, but I will expect you to make a short presentation on the journal during the later weeks of the course. Please come prepared to that session with a brief handout that describes the journal and notes its submission requirements. See Appendix Two for more details.
- Choose one of the recommended texts from a particular week, or follow one of the "bibliographic trails" within a required text to find a *substantial* text that your classmates are not reading for this class. Track down the text and do a "rapid read" that allows you to summarize its main points for your classmates. Don't spend more than a few hours on this task, and be ready to summarize it in five minutes or less for your classmates during the week that it is "recommended" (or, if it's one you've discovered from footnotes, then during whatever session makes most sense).
- Develop a major essay suitable for presentation at a regional AAR/SBL meeting based on some theme that catches your attention within the course. These essays will be shared with each other in the final weeks of the course, so as to practice presenting papers. I expect that you will edit them from the feedback there, and submit them for presentation to an appropriate scholarly society.
- Prepare and present each of the various "experiential exercises" embedded in many of the semester's sessions (see particular session for more details).

I. Introductions and orientation

September 13: Who are we? What are we on about?

Patterns and rhythms for the course
 Expectations and goals
 Extended introductions
 Gospel themes to attend to... (choose one to follow throughout the course)
 Niebuhr's "Christ and culture" typology...

Recommended:

Christ and Culture. H. Richard Niebuhr, Harper&Row, 1951.

September 20: Methodological concerns – the descriptive and the normative...

Required:

Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism, Edited by D. Brown, S. Davaney, K. Tanner; Oxford University Press, 2001.

What can you learn from this book about the varieties of things we'll be doing this term? What is missing that you hope we'll find a way to engage? What are the emergent questions? What makes you uneasy?

What do you notice about the essays themselves, as essays? How are they structured, what kinds of sources do they draw upon, what kinds of arguments do they make? These essays are good examples of the genre of essay your major writing requirement for this course could take on.

II. How does social analysis describe human practices? What normative assumptions are buried in the descriptions?

September 27: What is culture and cultural analysis?

Required:

Culture & Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis, Renato Rosaldo, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

"The astonishment of anthropology" (1-23), and "Cultural psychology: What is it?" (73-110), out of *Thinking through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology*, Richard Shweder, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

"Religion as an instrument of psychological warfare," in *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, by Ignacio Martin-Baro, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Recommended:

Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil. Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Berkeley: UCLA Press, 1992.

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, Anne Fadiman, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1998.

What are the primary methodologies in use in these writings? What methods of investigation do the authors employ, and how do these methods shape their findings? What "counts" as legitimate evidence, what are the criteria in use for determining what is "verifiable" and "reliable" about this evidence?

October 4: What is ritual and ritual analysis?

Required:

Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions. Catherine Bell, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

"Preface and Part One: Emergent ritual and liturgical authority," in Ronald Grimes, Washington, D.C: The Pastoral Press, 1993. (v-58)

Recommended:

Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual. Tom Driver, Westview Press, 1998.

Bring to class a description of a powerful ritual you were recently involved with (it could be one that occurred in a religious setting, or not). In what ways was meaning structured through that ritual? Be prepared to use Bell's and/or Grimes' definitions to analyze the ritual for your classmates.

October 11: Race issues, class issues as fruitful examples of ways to problematize your own positionality

Required:

Off white: Readings on race, power and society. Ed. By M. Fine, L. Weis, L. Powell, and L. Wong.

Recommended:

Being Black, Living in the Red. Dalton Conley, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Dismantling Racism: The continuing challenge to white America. Joseph Barndt, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991.

The Possessive Investment in Whiteness, George Lipsitz, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racism Training. Judith Katz, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978.

Bridging the class divide. Linda Stout, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

This week I'd like you to develop at least one experiential way in which you challenge your social location, particularly your racial location. If you are white, for example, and move primarily within white contexts, put yourself in a predominately "other" location for at least a couple of hours. What do you observe about your feelings and reactions in this context? What do you observe about other people's reactions to you? How does this contrast with your typical experience?

If you are not white, and often find yourself in the "minority" position, put yourself into a context where you are in the majority. What do you observe about your feelings and reactions in this context? What do you observe about other people's reactions to you? How does this contrast with your typical experience?

Be prepared to make a brief (no more than 5 minutes) presentation of your experience and its attendant analysis.

III. How does theological analysis norm human practices? What descriptive assumptions are buried in the normative claims?

October 18: How does theology/bible interact with culture/practice? Basic models and methodologies.

Required:

Models of Contextual Theology. Stephen Bevans, Orbis Books, 1992.

Recommended:

New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 1: Basic Statements, 1974-1991. James Scherer and Stephen Bevans, editors. Orbis Books, 1992. (Please note: this is a collection of basic statements from a variety of ecumenical organizations, as well as individual denominations.)

Bevans lays out a heuristic of sorts for understanding the multiple ways in which gospel and culture interact. Working from within your own confessional context (ie. within your specific community of faith), find at least one theologian or scripture scholar who is located at each of the points of the Bevans heuristic. If you can't find one from within your community for each point on the "compass," note at least one example from outside of your community. Write up a short paragraph on each, citing something from their work that justifies where you placed them on the compass.

October 25: How does theology/bible interact with culture/practice? A Protestant and a Catholic try it out in overarching theory/theology form.

Required:

Theories of culture, a new agenda for theology. Kathryn Tanner, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

Constructing Local Theologies. Robert Schreiter, Orbis Books, 1985.

Recommended:

New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 2: Theological Foundations. James Scherer and Stephen Bevans, editors. Orbis Books, 1994.

Imagine that you are overhearing a conversation between these two theologians. What would be the most pressing points of agreement between them, and where would they most likely disagree with each other? Come to class prepared to "play" one of them in an extended conversation.

This week we will also share what you've learned about specific scholarly journals.

November 1: How does theology/bible interact with culture/practice? Mission issues within marginalized spaces within the United States, or beyond.

Required:

Ministry at the Margins. Anthony Gittins, Orbis Books, 2002.

What does it mean to be "in mission"? In what ways does this book assume a particular social location for its reader?

Recommended:

New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 3: Faith and Culture. James Scherer and Stephen Bevans, editors. Orbis Books, 1999.

November 8: How does theology/bible interact with culture/practice? Mission issues within hegemonic cultural locations in the United States.

Required:

Practicing theology, Beliefs and practices in Christian life. M. Volf and D. Bass, editors. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Recommended:

Ordinary Ministry, Extraordinary Challenge. Norma Cook Everist.

A visit to the *Centered Life, Centered Work* website
(<http://www.luthersem.edu/clcw/>)

The Cultural Creatives, Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000.

What does it mean to be "in mission"? In what ways does this book assume a particular social location for its reader?

November 15: How does theology/bible interact with culture/practice? Popular culture/digital cultures/media cultures

Required:

The Mediated Spirit. Peter Horsfield, Uniting Church in Australia, 2002.

A Tribute to Our Heroes. Video on reserve in the library.

The Service in the National Cathedral. Video on reserve in the library.

Compare and contrast the two videos. What theologies are operative in the rituals presented in each? In what ways do the cultural contexts they are embedded in shape those theologies?

IV. Where do we go from here? Missional congregations and scholarly projects...

November 22: How does theology/bible interact with culture/practice? Between the global and the local

Required:

Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. Arjun Appadurai, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local. Robert Schreiter, Orbis Books, 1997.

Recommended:

Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Fortress Press, 2002.

December 6: How does theology/bible interact with culture/practice?

Student paper presentations.

December 13: How does theology/bible interact with culture/practice?

Student paper presentations.

Appendix One: Preparing and presenting required texts

One of the major learning goals of this assignment is to discover something of what is involved in teaching. You should keep several objectives in mind for your presentation:

- present the major points of the required texts in some fashion that allows your colleagues to “remember” the highlights and participate appropriately in a discussion of the texts
- identify two or three pressing challenges that you would like to see your colleagues engage relative to the texts under consideration
- consider how, if at all, you might reinforce ideas we covered earlier in the term by way of engaging these new texts
- if you can, identify additional materials that are related to the required texts, either by way of contextualizing them within a specific literature, or by way of challenging them from some other literature

Handouts are particularly appreciated, as are visual/musical/experiential exercises. Be creative!

Appendix Two: Accessing scholarly journals

This assignment is meant to encourage you to find the scholarly journals that will support your research and professional identity in the years to come. Our library has an excellent assortment, but even more can be found at Wilson Library at the University of Minnesota, and at the Ireland Memorial Library at the University of St. Thomas.

How do you choose? One place to start would simply be to browse the journals themselves in the periodicals room of the various libraries and see what catches your attention. Another idea would be to query your professors and pastors and find out what journals they read. Yet another entry point would be to think about the various scholarly societies to which you would like to relate; many of them have a standard journal as one benefit of membership.

Once you’ve identified a journal, please check with me to make sure no one else has chosen it, then read through at least one year’s volume (which is often only four or six issues). Please prepare a brief summary for your colleagues in handout form that lists the major kinds of questions this journal is interested in, its submission/publication guidelines, which services index it, and whether or not it is associated with a scholarly society.