Religion/Women’s Studies 324
Liberationist, Feminist, Queer and Postcolonial Theologies
in Latin America

“To know God is to do justice.”
- Gustavo Gutiérrez, Peruvian priest

“Poverty is a sin. Sin is that which leads to death. Salvation is that which brings life. Salvation means liberating people from all that leads to death.”
- Jon Sobrino, Salvadoran priest

“A feminist theological perspective that looks beyond the crucifixion of one man for the salvation of all denounces using the cross to maintain the oppression of women and the poor. Jesus’ suffering on the cross has often served as an excuse for justifying the misery imposed on the poor and especially on women. In fact, their submission to male authority has been presented as a duty based on obedience to Jesus, who was obedient to his Father even to death on the cross.”
- Ivone Gebara, Brazilian nun

“Unveiling sexuality as an ideology within theology helps us to remain more faithful to our faith not only as a negative exercise of denouncing theological manipulations, but also by rediscovering the presence of God and God’s wisdom in the communities of those outside heterosexual ideologies.”
- Marcella Althaus-Reid, Argentinian Queer Liberation Theologian

Instructor: Ann Lutterman-Aguilar

Augsburg General Education Requirements: This course fulfills a Humanities Liberal Arts Foundations (LAF) requirement at Augsburg College. Please note: You may not register for this course if you have already taken REL/WST 366.

Humanities Liberal Arts Foundation Statement
This Humanities Liberal Arts Foundation will help you explore the range and possibilities of human experience. Depending on the course, you may investigate the diversity of human nature and culture, our forms of communication and persuasion, our powers of reason, sympathy, and imagination, our needs as individuals and roles as citizens, and our relationship to the beautiful, the transcendent, and the divine. As the philosopher Martha Nussbaum has written, however, all Humanities disciplines have something in common: they help students use reason and imagination to enter broader worlds of cultures, groups, and ideas.

Augsburg’s Humanities departments are Communication Studies, English, History, Modern Languages, Philosophy, and Religion. These six disciplines engage human experience from different perspectives using different modes of discourse, but they share a common goal of rigorous inquiry into the ways written and spoken language can record, discover, and creatively express the truths of human experience.

Departmental Cross Listings
This course is cross-listed as both a Religion and a Women’s Studies course. You may choose either discipline. Regardless of whether or not you register for Religion or Women’s Studies credit, this course will help you explore the diversity of human experiences and encourage you to examine your forms of communication and persuasion, your powers of reason, sympathy, and imagination, your needs as individuals and roles as global citizens, and your relationship to the beautiful, the transcendent, and the divine.
Primary Texts

Secondary Texts

Course Rationale and Purpose
The cross and the sword: you can’t understand contemporary Latin America without at least a basic understanding of these dual forces and the complex ways in which religious beliefs have shaped Latin American history and culture. From the indigenous spiritualities of pre-Hispanic times to the Catholicism brought about by the Spanish conquest to the churches of today, theological perspectives have been used to justify, shape, maintain, and transform gender roles, sexuality, economic structures, nationalities, politics, and culture throughout Latin America. In fact, it would be impossible to fully understand Latin America without a basic comprehension of the historical roles played by the Roman Catholic Church and the multiple impacts of different theological perspectives on Latin American societies.

Although pontifical theology was used by the Roman Catholic Church in the late 1400s and early 1500s in order to justify Spain’s political, economic and religious expansion, many Latin Americans have embraced different forms of Christianity despite the conflicting imposition of the “the cross and the sword” at the time of the Spanish Conquest. Throughout Latin American history, progressive Catholics and Protestant Christians have often participated in struggles against slavery and the oppression of indigenous and Afro-Latino peoples, as well as in independence movements and revolutionary movements. The best known movements are revolutionary movements that took place in Central America in the 1980s and the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico that became public in 1994 and continues today.

Therefore, the purpose of this course is to help you comprehend the complex relationship between theologies and social/political transformation in Latin America and the emergence of Christian theologies that seek to foment human liberation from oppression based on socio-economic class, race and ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and culture. We will begin with a very brief examination of pre-conquest indigenous theologies and the theological arguments that were used to suppress indigenous theologies and rationalize the conquest and colonization of Latin America.
However, the primary focus of the course will be on Latin American Christian theologies of liberation, which started with Christian reflections on economic and political liberation and later began to address racial and ethnic liberation, women’s liberation, and the liberation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) people. Because women represent more than half of the general population and the majority of active church members, we will pay special attention to theories regarding the social and political impacts of diverse theologies on Latin American women. We will also analyze and critique feminist, postcolonial, and queer theologies of liberation in Latin America. Themes of race, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic class, gender, and sexuality will be woven throughout the whole course.

Throughout the course, you will also be encouraged to reflect upon your own religious and/or philosophical beliefs and to deepen your appreciation of religious values and theological perspectives that differ from your own. In addition, special attention will be given to critical thinking, which is defined as “an investigation whose purpose is to explore a situation, phenomenon, question, or problem to arrive at a hypothesis or conclusion about it that integrates all available information and that can therefore be convincingly justified” (Kurfiss 1988, 2). The goal is for you to continue to develop skills of analysis, critique, and evaluation, and to present your own beliefs, viewpoints, and positions to others.

You will use and develop your critical thinking skills by analyzing, critiquing and evaluating competing claims regarding each of the theological perspectives addressed in the course. One of your first tasks in this course is to understand and identify the different types of claims – i.e., beliefs, assertions, positions, theses, and hypotheses - that are made in the fields of Religious Studies and Women’s Studies. While certain authors and guest speakers who address the course make theological assertions regarding beliefs, other authors are make claims and assertions about the nature of religion itself. Therefore, before you can analyze the claims made by these authors and guest speakers, you must first learn to distinguish between these different genres and to identify the author or speaker’s intended audience and purpose.

Upon completion of the course, you should be able to demonstrate proficiency in each of the following critical thinking skills: 1) the identification, knowledge, and comprehension of other people’s theological claims, beliefs, and assertions, as well as political and sociological claims regarding the role of religion; 2) the analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of other people’s claims; 3) the assessment of competing claims; 4) the development of your own claims; and 5) the presentation of your own claims. Please note that you who seek to use this course to fulfill your Critical Thinking skill requirement at Augsburg College must obtain an average of at least 73% for the Critical Thinking Exercises and for the final course grade.

**Teaching Methodology, Pedagogy, and Ethics**

Teaching strategies include numerous lectures; small and large group discussions of required readings and experiences; films; artwork and music which express course-related themes; field trips; guest lectures and conversations with a wide range of Mexicans expressing diverse viewpoints; participant observation; and spontaneous writing exercises in class. Particular attention is given to story-telling, particularly by members of groups whose voices have been silenced. In addition, when scheduling guest speakers and other encounters, priority is given to women and to other individuals and groups who have been marginalized and under-represented in academia.

Due to the fact that approximately half of class time is spent listening to guest speakers, you are encouraged to develop your strategic questioning and listening skills. It is very important that you ask informed questions and share your own interests, opinions, and experiences with speakers so that they are not just educational consumers but partners in a common quest to learn more about social change. During internal class discussion sessions (those not involving guest lectures or excursions), I will try to apply principles of experiential, critical, and feminist pedagogies by encouraging you to reflect upon both cognitive and affective learning and to draw upon your own prior life experiences, as well as new experiences in Mexico.
Liberation and Social Change Lab Group
You will be asked to consider your own group of co-learners as a social change “laboratory,” as many of the same issues that require liberation and social change in society at large can be found within the smaller microcosms of learning groups. Therefore, in addition to our regular weekly internal class sessions, “social change lab groups” will meet approximately once/week throughout the semester. Active participation in the lab group includes planning and facilitating (or co-facilitating) at least one hour of a lab group session in coordination with the T.A. You will sign up near the beginning of the semester. At least 48 hours prior to the lab group session, you must submit a short proposal that outlines the topic(s) you plan to address and the specific lab group objectives you will fulfil. You will then meet with your T.A. to discuss the proposal and plans for the session. At the time of the session, you must submit a one-page outline. The T.A. and other you will be asked to complete a short feedback form at the end of the session, and you will be expected to submit your own completed self-assessment form. Be sure to read the separate handout about the Liberation and Social Change Lab Groups.

Course Units
I. Pre-Colombian Mesomerica and the Spanish Conquest
II. From the Spanish Conquest to the 1st Generation of Latin American Liberation Theology: Responses to Economic and Political Oppression
III. Methodology and Biblical Interpretation in Early Latin American Liberation Theologies
IV. Indigenous and Afro-Latino Theologies of Liberation
V. Latin American Feminist Theologies and Biblical Interpretation
VI. Postcolonial Theologies of Liberation
VII. Latin American “Indecent” and Queer Theologies of Liberation
VIII. Applying Latin American Liberation Theologies to Your Own Context: Migration, Globalization, and Other Issues

Learning Objectives/Outcomes
By the end of the course you should be able to:
1. Identify the key characteristics of the first generation of Latin American liberation theologies - theologies addressing economic, political, and racial/ethnic liberation.
2. Articulate the beliefs and theological methods that distinguish feminist, queer, and postcolonial Latin American liberation theologies from the first generation and from each other.
3. Analyze biblical hermeneutics in each current of Latin American liberation theology.
4. Evaluate prominent critiques of each current of Latin American liberation theology.
5. Analyze the complex relationship between Latin American liberation theologies and movements for social change, including movements that seek to improve the quality of women’s lives and movements that advocate gender equality.
6. Demonstrate your ability to find meaning in a written, visual, or spoken text by identifying different genres of both written and oral texts (rhetorical, literary, or other), identify the speaker’s or author’s thesis and/or theme, discern how the speaker or author develops and supports her or his arguments, and accurately paraphrase the main points in your own words.
7. Articulate what you have learned about the diversity of Mexican and other Latin American cultures and their religious belief systems or worldviews.
8. Explain the diverse ways that Latin American liberation theologians understand the social construction of race, ethnicity, nationality, and socio-economic disparity in their contexts.
9. Analyze dominant features of U.S. culture and spirituality, including individualism, through a Latin American liberationist lens.
10. Demonstrate improvement in your critical thinking skills through ongoing analysis, critique and evaluation of competing claims regarding Latin American theologies of liberation.
11. Compare and contrast Latin American liberation theologies with the theology and/or philosophy to which you were exposed as a child.

12. Reflect on and critically discuss respect for human diversity and difference in religious, philosophical, and cultural approaches, thought patterns, and values.

13. Articulate your understanding of the relationship between faith and reason.

14. Develop and present your own position on each of the primary currents within Latin American liberation theology.

15. Employ theological arguments to advocate effectively and with integrity in favor of or against a political or social cause you learned about while in Mexico or Latin America.

16. Record and reflect on your aesthetic response to experiences in Mexico and El Salvador.

17. Reflect on the ways in which Latin American liberation theologies affirm, challenge, and/or change your own beliefs and praxis as a person who lives in the United States – particularly with regards to concerns about migration, emigration, and globalization.

18. Create original work in a genre of creative written, visual, or oral expression that expresses your position on one of the prominent currents of Latin American liberation theologies that we studied over the course of the semester.

Course Requirements (100%)

1. **Class Participation and Portfolio (20%)**: Effective class participation includes not only regular attendance but also active participation in class sessions involving guest lectures and excursions, internal class sessions, and lab group sessions, as well as completion of a portfolio of all your work. Please note that class participation is required for a passing grade. Because participation is essential to the learning process, if you miss class activities for any reason you must speak to me prior to class and make arrangements to complete a short assignment. Absences due to religious holidays and illness are considered excused absences. However, you still must inform me of such absences in advance and talk to me about how to make up the missed session/s. You are also responsible for obtaining notes, handouts, and announcements from other you if they arrive late to class or miss a class session. Absences for personal travel or visits from family or friends are not excused absences. Your class participation grade includes:
   - Active Participation in Class Sessions Involving Guest Speakers and/or Excursions
   - Active Participation in In-House Class Sessions
   - Active Participation in Lab Group and Facilitation of a 1-Hour Session of Lab Group
   - Completion of your Learning Portfolio (see handout)
   - Group Blog and Photo-Essay: You will be expected to create and post at least two blog entries with photos that enable you to “pay it forward” by sharing what you are learning from guest speakers in Mexico and El Salvador with people back home. Your entries should focus on what you are learning about 1) the diversity of Mexican and other Latin American cultures and their religious belief systems or worldviews and 2) dominant features of U.S. culture and spirituality, as they compare and contrast with Mexican and other Latin American cultural and religious values.

2. **Critical Thinking Exercises (10%)**: You will be given five critical thinking exercises in which you will be expected to identify the genre of the written or oral text, (rhetorical, literary, or other), identify the speaker’s or author’s thesis and/or theme, discern how the speaker or author develops and supports her or his arguments, and accurately paraphrase the main points in your own words.

3. **Exam #1 on the 1st Generation of Latin American Liberation Theologies (20%)**: You will complete a two-part exam. In the first section, you will be asked to provide short answers to questions about the emergence of the first generation of Latin American liberation theologies, their prominent proponents and beliefs, their interpretation of the Bible, key critiques of such theologies, and the relationship between Latin American liberation theologies and movements for social change. In the second section, you will write a short essay in which you articulate your own position about the strengths and/or weaknesses of early Latin American liberation theologies that focused on economic, political, and racial/ethnic liberation.
4. **Advocacy and/or Educational Project and Oral Presentation on Liberation Theology (10%)**: Upon return from the 10-day seminar in El Salvador, you will develop and present a creative project that enables you to articulate your own answer to the question: “Why does what you believe matter?” You may use the visual arts, music, creative writing, or another form of creative expression to educate people back home about 1) the relationship between faith and reason, 2) the relationship between theology and politics, and 3) the impacts of liberation theologies on diverse people you met in El Salvador with regards to nationality, race, socio-economic class, ethnicity, gender, and/or sexuality. You must identify your target audience, and you will be graded on your effectiveness in developing and presenting your ideas to your chosen audience.

5. **Exam #2 on Feminist, Queer, and Postcolonial Liberation Theologies (20%)**: In the second exam you will be asked to explain the key beliefs and methodologies of feminist, queer, and postcolonial liberation theologies in your own words, drawing on examples from speakers and texts. You will also be asked to articulate what distinguishes feminist, queer, and postcolonial Latin American liberation theologies from the first generation of Latin American liberation theologies and from each other. Finally, you will be asked to argue your own position regarding the current of contemporary Latin American liberation theology that you find most affirming and/or challenging of your own beliefs.

6. **Final Creative Project and Oral Presentation (20%)**: Given that Latin American liberation theologies are contextual theologies that seek to foment human liberation from oppression, throughout the semester you are expected to analyze and reflect upon your own context back home and explore the ways in which feminist, queer, and postcolonial feminist theologies could provide clues to liberating action within that particular context. For your final project, you should draw on that semester-long exploration and design a creative project that will help you employ theological arguments to advocate effectively and with integrity in favor of or against a political or social cause impacting your own community.

You will be given more detailed information about each assignment and a schedule of required readings, class discussion topics, and assignments on the first day of class.