

Religion 366

Latin American Liberation Theologies

“When I give food to the hungry, they call me a saint. But when I ask WHY the poor are hungry, they call me a communist.” – Dom Helder Camara, former bishop of Recife, Brazil.

“Our church is persecuted precisely for its preferential option for the poor and for trying to incarnate itself in the interests of the poor.” - Oscar Arnulfo Romero, former Archbishop of San Salvador, assassinated on March 24, 1980

“I believe in the Sacred Scriptures as Word of God which must be lived and proclaimed, but I do not believe that it is the word of God when its reading and interpretation excludes, limits or denigrates the dignity of women and their equal participation in the ministry and church functions, or in submission without love and respect in the bosom of one’s home. Nor do I believe that its application transcends the limits of time and culture in such a way as to be applied as normative in the present.

- Rebecca Montemayor Lopez, Feminist Liberation Theologian & Baptist Pastor

“Enduring suffering imposed by the cross has been developed by religious traditions and social-religious systems as a veil to cover up different kinds of misery or unjust crosses....

Feminist theology opens a path to a human vocation to pleasure, beauty, and largesse.”

- Ivone Gebara, Roman Catholic nun and theologian, in Out of the Depths, p. 90.

Instructor: Karla Ann Koll, PhD

Credits: four semester credits

Augsburg General Education Requirements: This course fulfills one Humanities LAF (Liberal Arts Foundation) Augsburg College graduation requirement.

Humanities Liberal Arts Foundation (LAF) Statement: This Humanities Liberal Arts Foundation (LAF) 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.

Course Rationale and Purpose

It would be nearly impossible to truly understand issues of peace, justice, and social change in Latin America without developing an understanding of Latin American liberation theologies and their relationship to community-based movements for social change. These important theologies began with the premise that God is a God of liberation who helps communities liberate themselves from political and economic oppression, and today are extended to other forms of oppression such as sexist and heterosexist oppression and environmental

injustice. Therefore, the purpose of this course is to develop a profound understanding of Latin American liberation theologies.

During this course you will meet with people who are deeply involved in the struggle for justice, including some who have played significant roles in the development and practice of Latin American liberation theologies. Your reading will give you a theoretical framework as well as historical background for understanding the emergence of liberation theology.

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 continue to develop skills of analysis, critique, and evaluation, and to present your own beliefs, viewpoints, and positions to others.

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.

Course Bibliography

Required Readings (will be given to you as a packet):

- Althaus-Reid, Marcella. “Introduction” and “Let Them Talk! Doing Liberation Theology from Latin American Closets.” In *Liberation Theology and Sexuality*, 2nd ed. London: SCM, 2009, 1-17.
- Berryman, Phillip. “Introduction,” “Birth Pangs” and “God of Life.” *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond*. New York: Pantheon, 1987, 1-28, 151-161.
- Boff, Clodovis. “Methodology of the Theology of Liberation.” In *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria, eds. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996, 1-21.
- Boff, Leonardo. “Ecology: Politics, Theology and Mysticism.” *Ecology and Liberation, A New Paradigm*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995, 9-54.
- De la Torre, Miguel A. “Liberation Theologies: What Are They?” *Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2013, 41-62.
- Gebara, Ivone. “God: An Ecofeminist Approach to the Greatest of Mysteries.” *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999, 101-135.
- Gutierrez, Gustavo. “God’s Revelation and Proclamation in History.” *The Power of the Poor in History*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983, 3-22.
- “Kairos Central America: A Challenge to the Churches of the World.” In *Kairos: Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church*. Robert McAfee Brown, ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 71-104.
- May, Roy. “Dorothy Stang: Monkeys Cry and the Poor Die, Earth Stewardship as Liberation Ecology.” In Ricardo Rozzi, Steward T.A. Pickett, J. Baird Callicott, F. Stuart “Terry” Chapin, Mary E. Power, Juan J. Armesto and Roy H. May, Jr, eds. *Earth Stewardship: Linking Ecology and Ethics in Theory and Practice*. Springer, 2014 (forthcoming).
- Miguez Bonino, Jose. “Beyond Colonial and Neocolonial Christianity” and “Understanding Our World.” *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975, 2-37.

Rieger, Joerg. "Context Is What Hurts: Rethinking Contextual Theology in Light of Empire and Economics." In *The Reemergence of Liberation Theologies: Models for the Twenty-first Century*. Thia Cooper, ed. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, 19-28.

Tamez, Elsa. "Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics: A Retrospective." In *Women's Visions: Theological Reflection, Celebration, Action*. Ofelia Ortega, ed. Geneva: WCC, 1995, 77-89.

The following internet site "Theology Library-Liberation Theology," has articles or article abstracts that will be very useful: www.shc.edu/theolibrary/liberation.htm

Supplemental readings you might find useful:

Boff, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.

Boff, Leonardo. *Ecology and Liberation, A New Paradigm*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.

Cooper, Thia, ed. *The Reemergence of Liberation Theologies: Models for the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

De la Torre, Miguel A. *Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2013.

Sobrinho, Jon and Ignacio Ellacuria, eds. *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996,

Other useful books for background on Costa Rica:

Molina, Iván and Steve Palmer. *The History of Costa Rica*. 2nd ed. San José: UCR, 2012.

Palmer, Steven and Iván Molina. *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham and London; Duke, 2004.

Rocha Gómez, José Luis. *A Region Torn Apart: The Dynamics of Migration in Central America*. San José: Lara Segura Editores, 2006.

In addition, books in English for the course will be on reserve in the Enrique Strachan Library of the UBL.

Learning Objectives/Outcomes

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

1. Identify and explain the significance of key moments in the history of the development of Latin American liberation theologies.
2. Define Latin American liberation theologies and key concepts including their Christology, ecclesiology, and soteriology.
3. Articulate the methodologies used by Latin American liberation theologies and other contextual theologies to analyze and respond theologically to their realities.
4. Explain LTs' ecclesiology, that is, their understanding of what it means to be "the church" and of the vocation "calling" of the church.
5. Analyze the social, economic, political, and gender implications of Latin American liberation theologies.
6. Articulate the ways in which your own theological and/or philosophical beliefs about God, the church, your own vocation have been affirmed, challenged, and/or changed as a result of what you have learned about Latin American liberation theologies.

Teaching Methodology, Pedagogy, and Ethics

Teaching strategies include lectures; small and large group discussions of required readings and experiences; field trips to churches, and church-related organizations; and guest lectures and conversation with community activists.

Given that at least half of your course time is spent in excursions and/or 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 you are not just educational consumers but partners in a common quest to learn more about social change. It is also essential for you to take notes during and/or after all guest speakers and excursions so that you can incorporate quotes and examples into your assignments. These sessions are an integral and essential part of the course.

During the classroom discussion sessions (those not involving guest lectures or excursions), we will “process” the readings and field experiences, as well as inputs by the professor. Since the group is very small, the tone will be informal and we will share together our learnings, questions, and observations.

Course Design

This course is taught intensively for one month in Costa Rica. It is the only course you will take during that time. You will typically have several class sessions involving speakers and excursions, plus 8 (eight) classroom sessions. You will be given more detailed information about required readings, class discussion topics, and assignments as the course progresses.

Program of Classroom Sessions

1. What is theology? Introduction to Christianity in Latin America. The context of the emergence of liberation theology.
Readings: Berryman, Phillip. “Introduction,” “Birth Pangs” and “God of Life.”
Míguez Bonino, “Beyond Colonial and Neocolonial Christianity” and “Understanding Our World.”
2. The Method of Liberation Theology.
Readings: Boff, Clodovis. “Methodology of the Theology of Liberation.”
De la Torre, Miguel A. “Liberation Theologies: What are they?”
“Kairos Central America: A Challenge to the Churches of the World.”
3. Presentation on Liberation Theology by Pablo Richard; Discussion of Pablo Richard’s presentation.
4. The Bible in Liberation Theology
Readings: Gutierrez, “God’s Revelation and Proclamation in History.”
Tamez, “Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics: A Retrospective.”
Presentation by Profesor Violeta Rocha, Latin American Biblical University
5. Liberation Theology and the Environment.
Reading: Boff, Leonardo. “Ecology: Politics, Theology and Mysticism.”
May, Roy. “Dorothy Stang: Monkeys Cry and the Poor Die, Earth Stewardship as Liberation Ecology.”
Presentation by Professor Roy May, Latin American Biblical University, Retired.
6. New Directions for Liberation Theology.
Readings: Althaus-Reid, Marcella. “Introduction” and “Let Them Talk! Doing Liberation Theology from Latin American Closets.”
Gebara, Ivone. “God: An Ecofeminist Approach to the Greatest of Mysteries.”
Rieger, Joerg. “Context Is What Hurts: Rethinking Contextual Theology in Light of Empire and Economics.”
7. Remaining Questions
8. Presentation of final group and individual projects

Course Requirements: (100%)

Class Participation (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 group sessions. This means you need to take notes during guest lectures and excursions, as well as during internal class sessions. You should arrive to class having completed the course readings, reviewed the themes and objectives for the week, and be prepared to ask probing questions, share your own insights, and relate assigned readings to guest

speakers and excursions. Because participation is essential to the learning process, if you miss class activities for any reason you must make arrangements prior to class to complete a short assignment. You are also responsible for obtaining notes, handouts, and announcements from others if you arrive late to class or miss a class session. Absences for personal travel or visits from family or friends are not excused absences.

Reflection Journal (30%): Each participant will present a journal in which you will reflect both intellectually as well as emotionally on the readings and presentations. Each journal should have a **minimum of fifteen (15) entries, divided into two parts**. The professor will provide a list of guiding questions as the course develops, but the journal is also a free space for creative expression. Poetry, drawings and other forms of creative expression are encouraged. You are to reflect on the ways in which your own religious/philosophical values and theological perspectives have been strengthened, challenged and/or changed by your exposure to different theological perspectives in Costa Rica. You are also encouraged to share your personal responses to liberation theologies and think about ways in which you can apply what you are learning in your own context.

Critical paper (25%): Each participant will write a critical paper of 8 – 10 pages on some aspect of liberation theology that will allow a comparison between early liberation theologies of the 1970s and 1980s with the current situation in Costa Rica today. Specific topics must be negotiated with the professor. Participants will have an opportunity to present a brief summary of their paper on the last day of class as we review the learnings of the course.

Group Educational Project and Oral Presentation on Current Social Issues in Costa Rica and Contemporary Liberation Theologies (25%): Given that Latin American liberation theologies are contextual theologies that seek to foment human liberation from oppression, near the end of the course, you will divide into 4 small groups, each of which will be responsible for conducting research, including interviews, regarding issues such as: 1) the current socio-economic situation; 2) church-state relations; 3) environmental issues; 4) tourism; 5) immigration and basic rights; 6) gender concerns, including women's rights and the rights of gays and lesbians. Your group is responsible for reading at least 2 articles or book chapters by contemporary liberation theologians that address your topic and then developing your interview questions, conducting the interviews, and discussing the results and how they relate (or fail to relate) to the articles or book chapters you read. You will then design a creative project involving a 30-minute oral presentation that will enable you to educate others back home about this issue from both a social and theological perspective. As you design it, think about specific audiences with whom you can share this when you return to the U.S.A. You should treat your presentation to the class as a dress rehearsal for a presentation that you can share when you return to your own school/community. Therefore, you need to rehearse it and time it in advance. Oral presentations/projects may include monologues, one-act plays, debates, a mini-religious service (such as a college chapel service), a Bible Study, interesting PowerPoint presentations, videos to be uploaded to YouTube, and/or any other creative format that enables you to educate others both in the group and back home about what you learned and why it matters. All presentations should address the following questions: *a) Why is this an important issue in Costa Rica and Central America? b) In what ways is this issue a theological issue? What do theologians have to say about it? c) What are Costa Ricans doing about it? d) What can/should we do about it in our own context?*

Additional Comments

Explanation of Grades

Augsburg College uses a numerical grading system using the following definitions:

Number	Letter Equivalent	Percentage	Augsburg Definition
4.0	A	93-100%	Achieves highest standards of excellence
3.5	A-/B+	88-92%	
3.0	B	83-87%	Achieves above basic course standards
2.5	B-/C+	78-82%	
2.0	C	73-77%	Meets basic standards for the course
1.5	C-/D+	68-72%	
1.0	D	63-67%	Performance below basic course standards
0.5	D-	60-62%	
0.0	F	Under 60%	Unacceptable performance (no credit for the course)

A "Pass" grade is 2.0 or above.

Grading Policy and Late Assignments

You must submit assignments on time. If you need an extension, you must talk to us **in advance** to negotiate a new deadline. If you have not been given an extension in advance and you turn in a late assignment, you will be docked half a grade (from a 4.0 to a 3.5 or 3.5 to a 3.0, 3.0 to a 2.5, 2.5 to a 2.0, etc.) If you are more than one week late, you will be docked a full grade. No assignments will be accepted more than two weeks after the original deadline; a "0" will be given after that. Assignments due near the end of the semester will not be accepted after the last day of the semester.

Rewriting Assignments: If you receive a grade of 2.5 or lower, you may revise a paper as long as you resubmit it within one week of the date it was returned to you. Your final grade will be an average of the two grades.

Augsburg Honesty Policy

You are expected to follow the Augsburg Honesty Policy which is printed in the program manual. We assume that you have read the honesty policy, understand it, and are following it. Except when the assignment expressly encourages group work, it is assumed that all course work will be your own. You may not copy other students' work. The first occurrence of plagiarism will result in the failure of the assignment. A student who commits plagiarism a second time will fail the course.

Students' Rights and Responsibilities

Students with formally diagnosed learning or physical differences have legal rights to course modifications. Those who qualify should identify themselves to the instructor as soon as possible in order to obtain extra assistance.