

Prophetic Ministry

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The biblical model of the prophet is both frequently invoked and poorly interpreted. While the church continues to declare that the prophet “speaks for God,” it often limits such speech to pronouncements circumscribed by tradition. **At the level of social justice, an emphasis on deconstruction and critique with a failure to offer a constructive vision for a just order further circumscribes definitions of the prophetic.** Whether limited to ministries of justice, regular preaching, or charismatic utterance, the “prophet” suffers from a myopic understanding that fails to do justice to the richness of the biblical tradition.

This course is designed to mine said richness, drawing on more fully orbed understandings of the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures, proper nuancing of prophetic work detailed in the New Testament, and the African American struggle for racial justice. The latter should not be taken to mean that we will not consider issues of gender, ethnicity and economics. Rather these will figure prominently in our discussions when we consider what it means to be the Kingdom of God on earth.

Signal attention will be given throughout the course on the following themes:

1. The church as a prophetic community
2. The call to return to tradition
- 3. Understanding the relationship between service delivery and advocacy**
4. Transcendence and political engagement
5. Christian tradition, **the role of science**, and contemporary postmodern culture
6. Black moral self criticism
7. The role of the minister in church and community change
8. The development of a prophetic voice in the public square

Prophetic Ministry was designed by the HUSD faculty to provide participants with actual opportunities to engage their ministry contexts from a prophetic perspective. As such, guest presenters will attend class as both representatives of institutions and organizations within the larger social order and as people of faith. This will provide participants with the opportunity to engage key persons in the area whose work represents either a prophetic witness, or an institutional/cultural opportunity for the churches’ to interface with current realities which call for a prophetic perspective and engagement.

Important Resources:

The Alban Institute, www.alban.org
The Brookings Institution, www.brookings.edu

The Center for Public Justice, www.cpjustice.org
Center for Reconciliation, www.divinity.duke.edu/reconciliation
Hartford Institute for Religion Research, www.hirr.hartsem.edu
Industrial Areas Foundation, www.industrialareasfoundation.org
The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, www.jointcenter.org
The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, www.pewforum.org
Prism Magazine, www.esa-online.org
Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, www.pbs.org/religion
The Sentencing Project, www.sentencingproject.org
Science for Seminaries Project, www.scienceforseminaries.org
Sojourners, www.sojo.net
The Urban Institute, www.urban.org

Required Texts:

Alexander, Michelle, *The New Jim Crow*
Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*
Eiesland, Nancy. *The Disabled God*
King, Martin Luther, *The Beloved Community*
McKnight, John. *The Careless Society*
Wood, Richard, *Faith in Action*

Required Articles

American Chemical Society, *George Washington Carver: Chemist, Teacher, Symbol*

Boddie, Stephanie, et.al. *Healing Communities* (available at www.healingcommunitiesusa.com)

Edelman, Marian Wright. "The Cradle to Prison Pipeline", in *Focus*, Nov.-Dec. 2006 (JCPES), also, *America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline Report*, available at www.childrensdefense.org

Lebacz, Karen. "Fair Shares: Is the Genome Project Just?" *CTNS Bulletin* 13:4 (Autumn 1993)

National Council of Churches, "Genetic Science for Human Benefit," (1986)

Trulear. "Faith in the Public Square," *Vision and Values*, Grove City College, June 2004, 12:9

Trulear. "The Black Church and Public Policy," (handout of chapter for upcoming book edited by Dean Alton Pollard)

Course Objectives

1. To assist participants in developing an understanding of the prophetic
2. To explore ways in which participants can develop ministry distinctives that reflect a proper understanding of the prophetic
3. To help participants develop a prophetic critique of social and cultural norms
4. To assess various modes of prophetic engagement in African American church history
5. To develop an understanding of religion in the public square

6. To develop skills to fairly represent the Christian prophetic tradition in contemporary society
7. To have participants produce written work reflecting the church's prophetic engagement of American society and culture

Course Outline

Unit One: Defining the Prophetic: Biblical, Historical and Perspectives

27 August to 10 September

This unit is devoted to developing a basic understanding of prophetic ministry, liberated from the narrow confines of particularist traditions, and reclaimed as a basic biblical category that represents the Realm and Reign of God. Particular attention will be given to understanding the church as a prophetic community, resisting the cultural tendencies to individualize such ministry. We will also look at the processes of engaging the public square from a prophetic perspective, including developing resources for research and communication skills. Resources for these sessions will include The Bible, and *The Prophetic Imagination*.

27 August- 3 September.- Course Introduction: Syllabus, Methodology and Biblical Worldview

10 September- Public Communication and Prophetic Ministry

Book response (due 17 September): What is "royal consciousness?" Give an example that relates to your public document. Be careful to consider the relationship between social service and advocacy. How does prophetic imagination help you address this example? **Op-ed/Blog due 17 September: see issue list**

Unit Two: Prophetic Ministry: Advocacy and Service

17 September-31 September

This unit will focus on the ongoing tension between advocacy and service delivery in the churches' engagement of its social context. In addition, the notion of the nature of service delivery will be critiqued in light of biblical norms of neighbor and community. Advocacy will be examined in light of the need for moral self-criticism within the African American community. Resources include McKnight's *The Careless Society*, and Wood's *Faith in Action*

17 September- Asset Based Community Development

24 September- Community Organizing for Ministry: including discussion of Wood text and Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches video

1 October- The Service to Advocacy Continuum

Second paper due 1 October: Book response: Write an essay on how churches can both empower and disempower people to whom they minister in social outreach, using McKnight and Wood as frameworks. **Op-ed/Blog due 1 October: see issue list**

Unit Three: Prophetic Ministry and Vision Construction

1 October-22 October

This unit focus primarily on the tension between prophetic ministry as a deconstructive process and the role of the prophetic in envisioning a just society. Martin Luther King, for example, did not just denounce injustice, but also spoke of and worked for the “beloved community,” always careful to place his critique of society within the framework of vision. Genomic research becomes constructive on two fronts: both in framing a vision for society that calls for a relevant process of constructive theologizing, much as the development of the social and physical sciences challenged the church in the 19th and early 20th century, and in the politics of technology, whether its use will be justly applied. This unit also places the issue of the integration of religion and science at the center by considering the historic role of George Washington Carver as an exemplar of science, service and advocacy. Readings will include King, Lebacz, and the National Council of Churches.

1 October: Vision Construction and the Beloved Community
8-15 October: Resources for Vision Construction
22 October: Just uses of Technology

Third Paper Due 29 October: In moving from Carver to King to the Human Genome Project, how do you see the intersection of justice and technology? What are/might be the implications for the African American community? **Third OpEd/Blog due 29 October** see issue list

Unit Four Developing a Cultural Critique

29 October-5 November

This unit focuses on developing a critique of culture. This requires not only a vision for society, but also a careful consideration of theological anthropology. African Americans recognize the need for a humanizing anthropology in contemporary calls for dismantling mass incarceration, and, importantly, the contemporary BlackLivesMatter campaign. Our distinct lens for this unit will be disAbility and the church, with primary attention given to theology of disAbility, theological anthropology and the ethics of embodiment. How does our view of the body inform our ability to envision and perform justice? How do we think constructively about disease, mental illness, alcoholism, etc., in our calls for justice? As research has advanced our understandings of these issues, can we move to developed similarly informed prophetic vision? Such investigation will include strategies of inclusion, as well as a critique of stigma. Readings include Eiesland's *The Disabled God*, *The New Jim Crow* (last chapter), the Carver article and handouts.

26 February- Defining culture
5 March- disAbility and social stigma
12 March- Strategies of Inclusion

Fourth paper due 19 November Book response: **Black Lives Matter, disAbled Lives Matter, Diseased Lives Matter. Discuss. Op-ed/Blog due 19 November: see issue list**

Unit Five: Developing a Political Critique

19 November-3 December

The prior unit focused on culture- the system of shared values within a social order. This unit focuses squarely on institutional life, the configurations of relationships shared by a social group. While political institutions will have primary visibility, economic, educational and other institutions will be the subject of some discussion. Special attention will be given to the criminal justice system as an emblem of political institutional conventions in America. Focus will not be solely on dismantling mass incarceration, but restorative justice as well, including the role of forgiveness in and its relationship to healing relationships and institutions. Resources for this unit include Boddie, et.al. *Healing Communities, The New Jim Crow*, Trulear's *Faith in the Public Square* and "The Black Church and Public Policy" as well as *Worthington*.

12 November- History of Black Political Engagement

19 November- Restorative Justice: Relational and Institutional

3 December- Criminal Justice Policy

Fifth paper due December 10: Book response: In reading through *The New Jim Crow*, what do you see as the implications for humanization and alternatives to incarceration?

Op-ed/Blog due December 10

Written Assignments and Evaluation

At the end of each unit, participants are to submit a *two part, four page* paper. The first part will be an essay suitable for the **op-ed** page of their local newspaper or an **internet blog**. The issue addressed must reflect the theme of the unit, and be of timely interest to those who would read said newspaper. It is to be written from the perspective of the prophetic witness of the church, yet must be authored in a popular form accessible to the general populace. The second part will be a **book response** to a critical question raised in the readings for the unit. *Each* essay should be approximately five hundred words in length. These essays count for 60 percent of the final grade .

The final assignment for this class is a twelve page paper which will take the form of a proposal to the participant's congregation, denomination/reformation or judicatory. The proposal will be for an action and advocacy project that can be undertaken by the church body addressed. It must include (1) biblical theological rationale, (2) social/cultural analysis, (3) goals and objectives in keeping with political wisdom, (4) an implementation and *advocacy* plan and (5) an assessment of resources necessary to implement the project. This assignment counts as 30 percent of the final grade.

Class participation (attendance, timeliness of assignments, participation in discussions) accounts for the final 10 per cent. It is due 10 December.

Practicum

The one credit practicum requires that the participant visit an approved research agency, department or center and interview staff concerning the work they do with respect to public affairs and policy, and how that work can or should intersect with religion. Partic-

Participants should prepare a 5-7 page essay on their visit, including a description of the work of the agency itself.

Class participation accounts for the final ten per cent of the course grade.

Grading standards can be found on page 27 of the Student Handbook.

Prophetic Ministry Open-ended and Final Paper Topic Lists

EIGHT DIMENSIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL LIFE

Political

1. Government- Federal, State, County, Local
2. Branches of Government- Judicial, Legislative, Executive
3. Quasi-Public Institutions
4. Politics and Race, Ethnicity, Gender
5. War- Iraq, Afghanistan, Darfur, etc.
6. Citizenship- Immigration, Prisoner Reentry, DC Statehood
7. Criminal Justice- Incarceration, Sentencing, Policing, Prisoner Reentry, Juvenile Justice, Collateral Sanctions

Economic

1. Poverty
2. Minimum wage
3. Economic Stimulus
4. Unionization, privatization
5. Gentrification
6. Foreclosure
7. Gender and other forms of equity
8. Investment, profits, shareholder value
9. Financial literacy/personal finances

Educational

1. Public education

2. Charter schools/school choice
3. Higher education/research/teaching/professionalization
4. Special education
5. School violence
6. Curriculum/values
7. Standards, funding, regulation
8. Religion and education
9. Community partnerships

Family

1. Same sex unions
2. Single parenting
3. Human sexuality
4. Teen pregnancy/adolescent sexual behavior
5. Fatherhood/healthy relationships/HHS
6. Family connectivity and incarceration
7. Juvenile justice, violence, gangs
8. Minimum wage
9. Foster care/adoption

Religious

1. Religious freedom
2. Church/state
3. Charitable choice/faith based initiatives
4. Government and chaplaincy
5. White House agenda: Interreligious dialogue, economic recovery, abortion, fatherhood
6. Multisectoral collaboration

Health/Recreation

1. Accessibility to recreation
2. Health care reform
3. Substance abuse and health care
4. Medicare and Medicaid accessibility/CHPS
5. Role of sports in society
6. Health disparities among African Americans
7. Childhood obesity
8. DisAbility
9. Mental Health reform

Communication/Entertainment

1. Movies, TV
2. Rap music
3. Internet
4. Roles of African Americans
5. Commodification of news
6. televangelism
7. Digital divide