

## CORE 367C-70A/PHIL368C-70A: Liberation Thought

1-3-5, 1:00–2:10, Quad 347

Office hours: 1-3-5: 11:00 – noon; 2:15-4:00; 2-4-6: 1:00-3:00 PM

Dennis Beach, OSB

other times & evenings (Mary 229) by appointment

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### Description:

Twin strands of thought—theologies of liberation and philosophies of liberation—developed in the 20th century as practical and active rather than merely speculative ways to address problems of human oppression and unfreedom. Liberation theologians ground their advocacy of human freedom in their understanding of God and God’s plan for humans in their world. Philosophies of liberation instead ground their advocacy of liberation in active reflection on the historical and rational constitution of human individuals and societies. We will read and study a number of key exponents of these movements, from the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, to the Latin American theologians and philosophers Gustavo Gutierrez, Jon Sobrino, Elsa Tamez, Enrique Dussel and others. Black liberation thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and feminist liberation theologians and philosophers will be included, as well as the influence of Marxist and post-Marxist thought on liberation theology and philosophy.

### Texts:

- The Bible*, any edition.
- Gustavo Gutiérrez. *A Theology of Liberation*. Revised Edition. Translated & edited by S. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988.
- Robert McAfee Brown. *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible With Third World Eyes*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1984.
- Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30th Anniversary Edition). New York: Continuum, 2000.
- Karl Marx, [*Critique of*] *The German Ideology*. (Selections) (photocopy).
- Enrique Dussel. Selections, (photocopy).
- Frantz Fanon. “The Fact of Blackness” (photocopy).
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Instruction on Certain Aspects of “Theology of Liberation”” (photocopy).
- Jon Sobrino, S.J. Selections (photocopy).
- James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (selections) or other articles (photocopy).
- Readings in Latina and Feminist Liberation theology, as well as other relevant readings (photocopy).

\* Note: Your account will be charged \$6.00 for the cost of the photocopies.

### Objectives:

Our primary goal is to understand the currents of liberation thought, both religious and secular, *as ways of thinking*, rather than simply as historical phenomena. In other words, it is one thing to understand that “these currents of thought arose in religious and secular thinking during the latter half of the twentieth century and have roots in philosophy going back at least to Karl Marx,” but it is another thing to understand how and why one would think about liberation in the way these philosophers and theologians and Base Christian Communities do. We will also seek to understand why religion (or philosophy) should push people to think about liberation as one of its core doctrines. Our goal will be to become well-enough versed in the methods and themes of liberation thought that we can think in these ways ourselves, perhaps transforming our own perspective on religion and ethics. We will also consider criticisms of liberation thought, especially of theology, and seek to evaluate to what degree these criticisms are valid and how they might affect the status of the fundamental liberation principles. We will also seek to understand the relation of liberation theology and philosophy to other currents of thought, such as critiques of colonialism and Euro-centrism.

## Classroom Method and Daily Expectations

You should come to class having read the assignments carefully, with a questioning and venturesome spirit, ready to contribute to our common understanding. A number of the texts we will read are conceptually difficult and will require a “slow reading” approach. (“Slow reading” is a phrase that comes from Nietzsche: “this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read *well*, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers” [Friedrich Nietzsche, Preface to *Daybreak*].) Our aim with such texts will primarily be to learn their way of thinking. Other texts we will be able to read more quickly, and we will be able to focus our reflection on why and how the themes of liberation have come to be so central for religious and philosophical traditions and whether this centrality involves a distortion or misrepresentation of other approaches or of social, economic and political realities.

One last thing to remark is that worthwhile study requires a spirit of generosity, both towards the writers studied and towards the reader— one has to assume that the thinker saw deeply into a problem and tried to illuminate it, and one also has to assume that this insight is accessible to the reader with an active and open mind. Such generosity should prevent us from making overly-quick judgments and allow us to learn as much as we can from the readings and other material.

## Attendance

The attendance policy is strict: I allow no freebies, will begin to harass you at the second unexcused absence, will drop your participation grade a full level for each unexcused absence after that, and remove you from the class roster if the pattern continues. Absences may be excused if you contact me ahead of time, but only for illness, family emergencies, or official school activities. Doctor’s appointments not for immediate illness are normally unexcused. All absences, whether excused or not, should be communicated to me ASAP, ideally before the absence; failure to do so makes the absence count double.

I will also expect you to check the web schedule and to communicate by e-mail, as I will post or send out assignments clarifications, study questions, etc., this way. The schedule of daily readings and assignments will be kept on the web:

<http://faculty.csbsju.edu/dbeach/libthought/>

## Assignments and Grading

Allowing for the differences between these two types of reading and classroom goals (mastering difficult concepts vs. reflection on and critical assessment of liberation themes), I will give frequent short writing assignments, usually using public folders, that will attempt to lay the groundwork the day’s classroom activities. For this reason, these short assignments will necessarily be penalized if they are late. These short writings will be graded cumulatively (not individually) and will constitute 20% of your final grade. The Public Folder for this class is found following this path:

All Public Folders – Academic – Philosophy – Dennis Beach – LibThought .

For help finding Public Folders, see <http://www.csbsju.edu/itservices/knowledgebase/data/email/foldersuse.htm>

There will be several medium-sized papers (3-5 pages) that together will count for 60% of your grade, and finally two group projects that will account for the final 20% of your grade. One of these projects will be smaller, at the start of the semester, and one larger, near the end of the semester. That project will be in lieu of a final exam; however, we may need to use the two-hour scheduled exam period for presentations based on this final project.