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PT/HB612 SOCIAL JUSTICE: PROPHET AND REFORMER

The theology and practice of social justice will be examined from two dialogical viewpoints. The first is that of the prophet as spokesperson of God's justice and advocate for the poor who names and condemns social injustice. The second is that of the reformer who seeks to embody and institutionalize social justice. The issue of the types and uses of power in both of these viewpoints will be highlighted.

The course will start with a background study of the relevant history and sociology of ancient Israel to clarify the setting in which the dialogue occurs. Then the book of Amos will serve as our basis for defining the dialogical viewpoints. We will examine the strong critique of this prophet against the injustice of his day that ignored divinely inspired right relationships among people. The second viewpoint is contained in the re-composition of Amos' words by later Deuteronomistic editors intent on employing the prophetic critique in a program of national reform. References to the legal and theological parallels in the law code of Deuteronomy will complement the study of Amos.

The viewpoints examined will be seen as forerunners of and metaphors for modern understandings of action for social justice. Contemporary reflections thus will center on the roles, power, and responsibilities of two types of justice-seekers: the "prophet" and the "reformer." Particular attention will be given to the issue of how any person/class/group, both those with and those without institutional power and economic advantage, uses and incorporates the ideals of social justice. Reflections on a current social justice issue of the student's choosing, or from a student's social ministry site, will provide the sources for theory and praxis.

Prerequisites: HB500 and HB600

Competence Objectives

In completing this course a student will be able to:

- Demonstrate understanding of the types and uses of power in social relationships and social institutions.
- Apply this understanding of power to the analysis of the social world of ancient Israel and the analysis of a current social justice issue.
- Describe the social context of the book of Amos in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE using historical and sociological analysis and describe the roles of Amos as prophet and reformer in these centuries.
- Describe the theological foundations of the roles of Amos as prophet and reformer in the ancient context.

HB440 (F)

Social Justice: Prophet and Reformer

- Demonstrate the integration of critical biblical knowledge and theological insights with the contemporary practice of ministry by an appropriate analysis of the roles of prophet and reformer in a current social justice issue.

Course Expectations and Evaluation

1. Class attendance and preparation of all required reading before class.
2. Preparation of short assignments for class discussion and class participation. Evaluative criteria: comments and questions show a familiarity with assigned readings, clear and complete preparation of assignments, and a readiness to apply knowledge to interpretive questions and insights.
3. Three short papers (1500-1750 words, 6-7 pages each) based on assigned readings, class discussions and reflections on selected social justice issue. Due as specified in calendar, additional guidelines to be distributed. Evaluative criteria: papers show close reading of the biblical texts; an understanding of class readings, discussions, definitions and content; an ability to apply these to a current social justice issue; and are written in clear, concise and expressive language.
4. Three oral reports, (one on each paper) and leadership of class discussion based on the report. Due as specified in calendar, additional guidelines to be distributed. Evaluative criteria: oral reports show ability to present information and interpretation in a clear and organized fashion, explicating a position in a concise and timely way; leadership of discussion shows ability to handle questions, raise new interpretive issues, and guide fellow students in a cooperative learning situation.

Required Reading

Gerhard Lenski, Power and Privilege, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Coote, Robert B, Amos Among the Prophets, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005, c1981.

Other articles on Reserve in Library and/or Moodle web support