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**HB6/740**  
**SOCIAL JUSTICE: PROPHET AND REFORMER**

**NOTE TO ALL STUDENTS: THERE ARE CRITICAL STEPS WHICH MUST BE DONE BEFORE THE FIRST CLASS OF THE JANUARY INTENSIVE:**

- **SEE READING ASSIGNMENTS BELOW**
- **SEE SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE SELECTION BELOW**

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 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 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.

- 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 the January Intensive 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 oral reports 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.
4. 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.

### Required Reading

Gerhard Lenski, Power and Privilege

Robert Coote, Amos Among the Prophets

### Readings on reserve

Paula McNutt, Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999. Chapter 5 assigned.

Patrick D. Miller, Deuteronomy (Interpretation Commentary), Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990. Introduction assigned.

### **BEFORE THE FIRST CLASS IN JANUARY, READ THE FOLLOWING:**

Lenski 1-7, 22-23, 43-93, 189-296

McNutt, Chapter 5

Coote, 1-45, 46-109

### Social Justice Issue Selection

**PLEASE BRING AT LEAST ONE IDEA FOR A SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE YOU WOULD LIKE TO WORK ON TO THE FIRST CLASS and bring an awareness of any research you have been able to do on that issue**

The most important thing to think about is picking a current social justice issue on which to concentrate during the course. Because the class size is large for a seminar, you will have to work in teams of two or three on the selected issues or the number of individual reports/issues will be overwhelming. So you will team up with another person or two on the first day of class.

The issue you pick should be a current issue that involves some aspect of social justice anywhere in the world. Several criteria are helpful in picking the issue so that it "works":

- **The issue must be as specific as possible**--"the world banking system" is far too large (even though it may be highly unjust!) "Third world debt" is too large; "free trade" is too large, "the medical insurance system" is far too large, etc. Even within an issue, say "native land rights" in North America or elsewhere, pick a **specific** example or case to work on.
- **There must be a clearly identifiable "victim"** for the issue to work for the course. Someone must be being hurt by the actions/decisions of others in a way that is socially unjust, not just morally questionable or wrong. Issues of personal wrong, while horrible, don't work for the course because there is a limited involvement of social systems. So "spousal abuse" is not a workable issue; governmental cutbacks to programs to protect women would be more suitable, especially if you can find out about a particular cutback in a particular location that has affected specific people.
- **You must be able to identify all the "actors" in the issue and where they stand socially in relation to each other.** Who are the victims? Who is functioning at each level of government or other social structures to affect the issue for good or ill? Who is advocating for various sides in the issue? The point is not to have exhaustive research on these topics, but to know enough to examine the people and roles involved in your selected case. If you can, bring resources with you that describe the issue--newspaper articles, internet information, etc.
- It is better, given the short length of the course, to **use an issue you already know a lot about.** There is not time to explore a new issue. The point is *how we will analyze the issue* during the course, not learning about a new situation.
- An issue often works if it presents a **specific case of a wider problem.** That way you can work on an important issue but not be overwhelmed.

Some very successful issues have worked well in the course in the past: a specific native land case in southwest Ontario; the slave trade in the Sudan; the "lobster wars" in Nova Scotia; a very local case where a small town was failing to protect a mentally challenged man from abuse; cutbacks to welfare in a particular location at a particular time; closing of a particular mental health care facility by the province without providing other homes for the residents; cutbacks to low-income housing in a particular city at a particular time. Use an issue that affects your own ministry or community if you want—you may know lots about it and want some time to work through a biblically just response. Just change names to protect identities.

**Group work:** As noted, the size of this course requires that issues be done by groups. Each student is expected to make an equitable and fair contribution to the work of the group at all times. This will require being available to meet as needed with your group outside of class, although some work can be done by email, etc. Please let me know immediately if your group is having trouble coordinating work, so that I can help negotiate a workable plan of action.

***All papers are done as individuals, drawing on the information gathered by the group.***

## Writing HB698 Hebrew Exegetical Paper option

### THIS OPTION WILL EXTEND INTO SPRING SEMESTER, WITH HEBREW TUTORIAL SESSIONS SCHEDULES DURING THE TERM

#### Competence Objectives

- **Development of interpretation and exegesis skills using Hebrew** Focusing on texts relevant to the course and using Hebrew-English Bible software, lectionaries, theological dictionaries and other tools, the exegesis component course will give students a greater facility in interpreting the Hebrew Bible. Especially emphasized will be the transition from translation to exegetical and theological insights. The major exegesis paper required for various Basic Degree programs will be written as the final paper for this course instead of the three short papers.
- **Demonstrate an ability to use Hebrew in interpretation and exegesis of prophetic texts**
  - A. Apply various standard interpretation techniques to provide interpretive and translational comments on an acceptable translation of a text using lexical aids
  - B. Apply an introductory knowledge of Hebrew to explicate and analyze a text
  - C. Apply research methods and appropriate hermeneutical methods to interpret a prophetic text both in its ancient context and in contemporary contexts

#### Expectations and Evaluation

1. Weekly tutorial class in Hebrew interpretation, with texts as assigned each week; evaluative criteria: notes on Hebrew and interpretation comments are adequately prepared to justify your translation and interpretation of Hebrew words and grammar
2. Critical Interpretation Paper including appropriate interpretation and commentary on the translation of an assigned passage with appropriate grammatical and parsing notes; the student's own notes on the interpretation of the text; and an exegetical paper explicating and interpreting the text in its ancient contexts and contemporary contexts. Evaluative criteria: interpretation notes on the text are complete and justifiable with appropriate grammatical notes; the exegesis paper accomplishes an exegesis of the passage using standard exegetical tools and resources specifically including insights drawn from the student's Hebrew and from study of commentaries/resources which rely on/discuss the Hebrew text, and the paper accesses and integrates contemporary hermeneutical insights.

#### **Critical Interpretation Paper: due the last day of spring term, or the stated date for graduating students**

- Is approximately 6250 words (25 pages) in length, excluding appendix commentary that may run up to another 10 pages.
- Covers a passage of Hebrew of approximately 15-20 verses, normally respecting the natural limits of the passage or chapter.
- Includes as an appendix a full commentary on the translation of the selected passage, accomplished by the student with the aid of any lectionaries and grammars, indicating major grammatical and syntactical forms.
- Accomplishes an exegesis of the passage using standard exegetical tools and resources specifically including insights drawn from the student's Hebrew interpretation and study of commentaries/resources which rely on/discuss the Hebrew text.
- Discusses contemporary/contextual interpretations of the passage and/or its prophetic context, using at least two sources from feminist/Third World/Native or other contemporary hermeneutical approaches and the student's own interpretation.