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COURSE DESCRIPTION

TH5/725 - Prophetic Presence: What's God and the Church's Role during a Time of Profound Change?

PURPOSE:

For centuries Christians have affirmed the providence of God, the unique value of Jesus' life and teachings, and the special status of the church. What does it mean to affirm these things in an age of pluralism, when all is in flux and the planet itself is threatened? In this class we will explore what it means to be ancient/future Christians, connecting deeply with the world and the people around us while speaking (and living) prophetically.

Our discussions will thus walk along the boundaries between the historic Christian faith and the contemporary world. We feel on our shoulders, and in our hearts, the weight of a planet in crisis. While some of our theologies may not have stood up to the test, the radical Jesus of the gospels seems to grow increasingly relevant. Why, and in what ways? What does this homeless prophet who "has no place to rest his head," who was spurned by the religious institutions of his day, have to say to a world in flux?

EXPECTATIONS COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES

The course is designed to investigate the evolving nature of the church and its prophetic presence in the world in light of today's most pressing issues. Having completed this course with competence, each student will be able to:

1. Articulate an understanding of the transformations in society, the planet, and the emerging global culture that are changing human existence, religion, and spirituality.
2. Analyze the new demands that these changes are making on the church.
3. Reflect theologically on new ways to express what the Christian tradition and the Jesus of the Gospels has to offer to this world in flux.
4. Develop constructive proposals for speaking differently and living differently in light of these changes and the readings and discussions from the class.

REQUIRED READINGS

* Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: When The World's Biggest Problems and Jesus' Good News Collide*. Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2009.

* Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Ecology and Justice Series). Orbis Books, 1997.

* Philip Clayton, *Transforming Christian Theology: For Church and Society*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011.

Marti, Gerardo, and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity*. 2011.

Malinda Elizabeth Berry, Peter Goodwin Heltzel, and Bruce Ellis Benson, eds., *Prophetic Evangelicals: Envisioning a Just and Peaceable Kingdom* (Prophetic Christianity Series). Eerdmans, 2012.

Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. Fortress, 2001.

James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. Orbis Books, 1997.

Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.

John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. HarperOne, 2009.

Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*. Zondervan, 2006.

Brian McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side*, Expanded edition. Zondervan, 2003.

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger. *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005.

John Caputo, *What would Jesus deconstruct? The good news of postmodernity for the church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.

Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions: An Introduction to the Theology of Religion*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*. SCM, 2010.

Mike King, *Postsecularism: The Hidden Challenge to Extremism*. James Clarke & Co Ltd 2009. (A book that looks at the possibility of “spirituality” outside institutional religions and within the “secular” world.)

Alan Race, *Making Sense of Religious Pluralism*. SPCK, 2013.

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. **Readings and Class Participation:** Students are expected to participate in class discussions and to prepare fully for each class session. The educational value of the class to you is cut in half (at least!) if you have not read the texts before class; in fact, I recommend that if possible you read them fully before the course starts.
2. **Reading Notes:** As you read each text (in advance of the class!), take notes, ideally on your computer. You will need to print the notes on each text and bring them to class. These are not statements of your responses — those are (3) and (4) below. They are notes on what the author says and recommends. The goal of the notes is to record and remember the most important insights from each book. By having them with you in class, you will be able to quote page numbers and remember key points, for the sake of your own learning and the quality of the class discussions. Your reading notes will be turned in after the course is over. Hint: don't take so many notes that you can't finish the readings!
3. **Collected Daily Reflections:** Each evening of the class, write out your own two (more if you insist) page response, thinking back over what you have read and what has happened in class that day. These are not formal papers; they are your own wrestling with the material — where it has unsettled you, where it has inspired you, where it has brought you new ideas. At the end of the class please combine these

four reflection papers together into a single Word doc called "Course Reflections" and turn it in.

4. **Constructive Theology Paper (Due 31 August):** Write a 7-page paper in which you develop your own constructive proposal for speaking and living in light of the changes and challenges covered in this class.

ASSIGNMENTS

- **Audit students** are required to do all the reading and participate in the class discussions and activities.
- **Certificate students** are required to do all the reading, participate in the class discussions, and turn in the Collected Daily Reflections. Your performance on these three together will constitute 100% of your final mark.
- **Basic degree students** are required to do all the reading, participate in the class discussions, and turn in the Collected Daily Reflections and Constructive Theology Paper (minimum 6 pages). The Reading Notes are encouraged but not required.
- **Advanced degree students** are required to do all the reading, participate in the class discussions and the assignments as listed above. The Constructive Theology Paper for ThM students should be 15 pages and is due Monday, Sept 24, 2018.