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### **HB6/740 SOCIAL JUSTICE: PROPHET AND REFORMER (AMOS)**

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.

Prerequisite: HB500

Available for in-person and synchronous Zoom participation

#### **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 justice by an appropriate analysis of the roles of prophet and reformer in a current social justice issue.

### **Course Expectations and Evaluation**

#### **For all students:**

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 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. Depending on class size, the class may be grouped into teams for work on the social justice issues.

#### **Written assignments:**

4. For students not falling into the next two categories: 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.
5. For MDiv students and MATS Biblical Area students: A final Critical Interpretation paper following assignment instructions to be handed out in class. You will be able to use the social justice issue of your group in writing the paper, if you wish. For MDiv students who have taken BIBL500, it is expected that you will use Hebrew in the preparation of the Critical Interpretation paper. Evaluative criteria; completeness in addressing the task of exegesis and critical interpretation, ability to integrate that interpretation with a current social justice issue.
6. For ThM students: please check with professor for course requirements in addition to the basic requirements.

#### **Required Reading**

Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984. – available as an ebook at the VST Library

Coote, Robert B, *Amos Among the Prophets*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005, c1981.- on order at UBC bookstore

#### **Other articles on Reserve in Library and/or Populi**

**HB640 – Social Justice Issue Selection**

The most important thing to think about ahead of time is picking a current social justice issue on which to concentrate during the course. If 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. In this case, you will team up with one or two other people on the first day of class. However, it's worth doing some thinking ahead of time about an issue you might want to use that you can suggest to your potential team. If you know someone in the class and want to team up ahead of time, that's fine.

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" in the course.

- **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 "Indigenous 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: an Indigenous 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 neurodiverse 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 is 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.