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Liberation Theologies in the Americas

THEO 252

Graduate Program in Pastoral Ministries, Santa Clara University

Thursdays (In-Person and Online), 6-9:00 p.m. PST

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Winter 2026
Office Hours: Zoom or In-Person, by Appt.



Crucifix in wood and clay
by Peruvian sculptor, Edilberto

Course Description

This course looks at one of the most important movements of the 20th century and its continuing significance for theology today. Having emerged in various forms (i.e. Latin American, Black, Feminist, Latine, etc.), liberation theology stresses that religious faith is not exempt from political questions, it asserts a preferential option for the poor and oppressed, and it affirms the Kingdom of God in the here-and-now.

GPPM Mission Statement (short version)

The Graduate Programs in Pastoral Ministries at SCU seek to transform hearts and lives through the engagement of theology and ministry for competence, conscience, and compassion in accompanying others.

Required Texts

- De La Torre, Miguel. *Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2013)
- Gebara, Ivone. *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Fortress, 1999)
- Griffin, Michael and Jennie Weiss Block, eds. *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez*
- Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology* (Orbis, 2004)

SCU Land Acknowledgment

We pause to acknowledge that Santa Clara University sits on the land of the Ohlone and Muwekma Ohlone people, who trace their ancestry through the Missions Dolores, Santa Clara, and San Jose. We remember their connection to this region and give thanks for the opportunity to live, work, learn, and pray on their traditional homeland. Let us take a moment of silence to pay respect to their Elders and to all Ohlone people of the past and present.

Objectives

In this course, you will:

1. analyze and critically interpret key primary documents of liberation theology
2. work collaboratively and collegially in with other engaged learners
3. explore the continuing significance of liberation theology for today's world
4. reflect thoughtfully on the implications that liberation theology may have on your own life and/or ministry
5. articulate and develop a central question or problem worthy of further consideration

Assessment

25%	Weekly Discussion Boards and In-Class Assignments (Objs. 1,3,4)
7%	Open-Book Quiz, Wk 2 (Objs. 1,3)
8%	In-Class Participation, Seminar Leaders, Weekly Journaling, and Group Work (Objs. 1-5)
15%	Reflection 1, Due Wk 5 and revisions due Wk 8 (Objs. 1&5, and possibly 3&4)
45%	Final Project: 2 Proposals 2%, 2 Rough Drafts 3%, 1 Final Paper 40% (Objs 1, 3-5)

Expectations and Course Policies

I have high expectations for your participation and work in this class, including the following:

Careful Reading and Active Participation

- your participation begins at home with a careful reading of the assigned text(s) in advance of each class. This should incorporate taking notes in the margins of the text. (See the last page of this syllabus for other ways to improve your critical reading abilities.)
- participants are expected to respond to short prompts on Camino ahead of each class session. Posts should be completed by 2 p.m. on Tuesday (for Tuesday classes) and by 6 p.m. on Fridays (for Saturday classes).
- as this is a seminar-style class, you will be expected to work and learn collaboratively and respectfully with other students.
- In this class, active participation refers not only to making oral contributions that are clear, intelligent, and on-task, but also to your ability to listen carefully to others so that when you do make a contribution, you are building upon the conversation.

Seminar Leadership

- Each student will sign up to serve as a seminar leader on a particular week. Leaders are expected to.... [to be collectively decided on the first day of class]



Mural of Oscar Romero,
El Salvador

Class Policies

Attendance

Collaborative learning requires your steady and timely presence, both online and in-person. Active participation involves not only contributing to the conversation, but also, listening attentively to others.

Academic Integrity, Special Accommodations, and Classroom Etiquette

- First and foremost, our classroom is a place of joint collaboration and mutual respect.
- academic integrity. Work done for this course must adhere to the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#). If proven, a charge of academic dishonesty or plagiarism could result in an automatic F in the course. If you have any questions or doubts about what plagiarism entails or how to properly acknowledge source materials, you are expected to discuss it with me. In this class, plagiarism also includes using ChatGPT or similar AI tools without proper attribution and citations.
- If you need an extension on a paper, please notify me at least 24 hours in advance of the due date in order to receive an extension. I will be happy to work with you on this.
- I will gladly work with students with special learning needs through SCU's [Office of Accessible Education](#) (Benson 1, 408-554-4109)

Technology Support

SCU can provide you with technology assistance. For Camino support, contact caminosupport@scu.edu or call 408-551-3572. You can also use the help button within the Camino platform (on the left hand navigation) for 24/7 support via chat or phone.

For SCU network and computing support, contact the SCU Technology Help Desk at techdesk@scu.edu or 408-554-5700. They can provide support for MySCU Portal, Duo, ecampus, and more.

Grading Criteria

Final course grades will be assigned on the following basis:

"Exemplary"	"Good"	"Satisfactory"	"Unsatisfactory"
A 93-100	B+ 87-89	C+ 77-79	D+ 67-69 F 0-59
A- 90-92	B 83-86	C 73-76	D 63-66
	B- 80-82	C- 70-72	D- 60-62



Gustavo Gutiérrez



Ivone Gebara

COURSE SCHEDULE

(subject to revision)

1. Th, Jan 8	<p>Welcome!</p> <p>This session will include Introductions and Building Community Exercises, a Review of the Syllabus, and a Viewing of the Documentary <i>Monseñor: The Last Journey of Oscar Romero</i>, and reflections on the Film</p>
2. Th, Jan 15	<p>Liberation Theology (LT): Seeing the Forest Through the Trees</p> <p>We will spend some time connecting our life trajectory to last week's documentary and to LT's understanding of "the fullness of life."</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tirres, "Towards a Liberating Spirituality" 6-31. 2. TBD
3. Th, Jan 22	<p>LT: Appreciating Particular Trees in the Forest</p> <p>Hennelly Reader – <i>Selections of Various Chapters, which could include the following:</i> Preface & General Introduction, Chs 1-2 (p.xii-28); Part II Intro., Chs 4-5 (p.39-57); Chs 7-9 (p.62-88)</p> <p><u>Rationale:</u> To offer a close look at a range primary documents that have been central to the development of LT.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take the asynchronous online Quiz by noon on Ap 16. 2. De La Torre, <i>Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians</i>, p. 1-112 (Chs 1-5). (Please do not be daunted by the number of pages here. This is a small book and an easy read.) <p><u>Rationale:</u> To gain a fairly broad understanding of the tradition of liberation theology as a whole.</p>
4. Th, Jan 29	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take the asynchronous online Quiz by noon on Ap 16. 2. De La Torre, <i>Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians</i>, p. 1-112 (Chs 1-5). (Please do not be daunted by the number of pages here. This is a small book and an easy read.) <p><u>Rationale:</u> To gain a fairly broad understanding of the tradition of liberation theology as a whole.</p>
5. Th, Feb 5	<p>Gustavo Gutiérrez (1928-)</p> <p>Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," p. 19-37 (PDF)</p> <p>Gutiérrez, <i>We Drink from Our Own Wells</i>, selections (PDF)</p>

	<u>Rationale:</u> To take a deeper dive into the work of one the central architects of LT.
6. Th, Feb 12	Real-World Applications of LT Farmer and Gutiérrez, <i>In the Company of the Poor</i> , selections. <u>Rationale:</u> What can LT look like in practice? How can it inform medicine and health care? This book broaches these questions.
Sun, Feb 15	Reflection 1 Due
7. Th, Feb 19	Black Theology: James Cone (1938-2018) 1. Paulo Freire, "Foreword to 1986 Edition" (of Cones's <i>A Black Theology of Liberation</i>), vii-ix (PDF) 2. James Cone, "The Content of Theology," 1-20 (PDF) 3. Another short reading or viewing. <u>Rationale:</u> What does LT look like from the vantage point of the U.S. African-American experience? These resources explore the theological contributions of Black Theology's leading proponent.
8. Th, Feb 26	Ecofeminism: Ivone Gebara (1944-) Ivone Gebara, <i>Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation</i> , selections. <u>Rationale:</u> How does ecofeminism build upon LT in important ways? What is at stake in considering an ecofeminist framework? Gebara helps readers to take these questions seriously.
9. Th, Mar 5	Liberation in Everyday Experience ("Lo Cotidiano"): Ada María Isasi-Díaz (1943-2012) Ada María Isasi-Díaz, <i>La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology</i> , selections <u>Rationale:</u> At the grassroots and everyday level, how can individuals and communities undergo recurring processes of conscientization? And how can theology be approached from a more personal and autobiographical perspective? Isasi-Díaz's work invites us consider both questions.
Sun, Mar 8	Revised Reflection 1 Due/ Continue working on Final Paper and Related Presentation
10. Th, Mar 12	Class Presentations, Writing Workshop, and Celebración
Week 11	FINAL PAPER DUE: Day and Time TBD.



James Cone



Paul Farmer



Ada María Isasi-Díaz

Grading Criteria for Written Work

The Unsatisfactory Paper

The D or F paper either has no thesis or else it has one that is strikingly vague, broad, or uninteresting. There is little indication that the writer understands the material being presented. The paragraphs do not hold together; ideas do not develop from sentence to sentence. This paper usually repeats the same thoughts again and again, perhaps in slightly different language but often in the same words. The D or F paper is filled with mechanical faults, errors in grammar, and errors in spelling.

The C Paper

The C paper has a thesis, but it is vague and broad, or else it is uninteresting or obvious. It does not advance an argument that anyone might care to debate. "Henry James wrote some interesting novels." "Modern cities are interesting places."

The thesis in a C paper often hangs on some personal opinion. If the writer is a recognized authority, such an expression of personal taste may be noteworthy, but writers gain authority not merely by expressing their tastes but by justifying them. Personal opinion is often the engine that drives an argument, but opinion by itself is never sufficient. It must be defended.

The C paper rarely uses evidence well; sometimes it does not use evidence at all. Even if it has a clear and interesting thesis, a paper with insufficient supporting evidence is a C paper. The C paper often has mechanical faults, errors in grammar and spelling, but please note: a paper without such flaws may still be a C paper.

The B Paper

The reader of a B paper knows exactly what the author wants to say. It is well organized, it presents a worthwhile and interesting idea, and the idea is supported by sound evidence presented in a neat and orderly way. Some of the sentences may not be elegant, but they are clear, and in them thought follows naturally on thought. The paragraphs may be unwieldy now and then, but they are organized around one main idea. The reader does not have to read a paragraph two or three times to get the thought that the writer is trying to convey.

The paper is always mechanically correct. The spelling is good, and the punctuation is accurate. Above all, the paper makes sense throughout. It has a thesis that is limited and worth arguing. The paper does not contain unexpected digressions, and it ends by keeping the promise to argue what the writer states s/he will argue at the beginning of the paper.

The A Paper

The A paper has all the good qualities of the B paper, but in addition it is lively, well paced, interesting, even exciting. The paper has style. Everything in it seems to fit the thesis exactly. It may have a proofreading error or two, or even a misspelled word, but the reader feels that these errors are the consequence of the normal accidents all good writers encounter.

Reading the paper, we can feel a mind at work. We are convinced that the writer cares for his or her ideas, and about the language that carries them.

Recommended Reading Strategies

1. If the selection is in a digital format, and if possible, **print out a hard copy** so that you can mark it up.
2. Take 2-3 minutes to do some **initial skimming**.

What is the title?
Who is the author?
Do you already know anything about the author?
Who do you think was the original audience?
Why do you think your instructor assigned this reading?

How would you make the title into a question? What would that question be?
Are there subheadings? What are they?
Based on your initial skim, what do you think the article or chapter is going to be about?

This initial work is important because it helps you start to form a conceptual framework for understanding the main claims of the article. Although it is not “reading” in the usual sense, it will provide you with a rough map of where the reading is going.

3. When you get to them, **read the introduction and conclusion *slowly and carefully***.

What is the thesis of the article? (It usually appears in the introduction.) Find and mark it.
Does the author reiterate the thesis in the summary? If so, mark it.

4. **Read the whole article or chapter, and mark it up!** You should feel free to vary your reading speed for different purposes. For example, if you understand an author’s point or see that they are about to give a number of examples, you can speed up your reading a little. Conversely, you should always slow down when reading topic sentences of paragraphs, transitions, and, of course, the introduction and conclusion. As you read, consider doing the following:

- Circle key terms (terms that are repeated often or central to the thesis)
- Underline central claims (statements that a reasonable person could dispute or call into question)
- Identify unknown vocabulary words (and, if you have time, write the definitions in the margins)
- Use a star or arrow or some other visual cue to highlight big ideas
- Don't mark everything! (And be wary of using a highlighter, or, if you use one, use it sparingly)
- Pretend you are having a conversation with the author. Write your comments or questions in the margins, whatever they may be.
- Write key words or ideas in the margins, so you can find these passages later

5. When finished reading, **write a 2-4 sentence summary** of the article

Write it at the top of the article, and use your own words. You will be very happy you did this!

If you’re not sure what a good summary would be, then you should re-read as necessary.

You might also think about how this article connects to other materials, conversations, lectures, experiences, etc. from the course (and/or your other courses!) Write down those connections.

In the beginning, this process of reading may take you a little more time, but it is worth it. It will get easier and faster to do the more you use it, eventually becoming second nature.