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RELS 232-01, Racism and the Bible, Fall 1998

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| Authors | McKenzie, Steven L. |
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RS 232: Racism and the Bible
Fall, 1998, MWF 9:10-10:10 AM
Prof. Steven L. McKenzie
Office: C408, X3908
Hours: By appointment

Description: This course consists of three components:

1. An academic component (approx. 60% of the course), which will entail reading biblical texts in their historical and cultural setting and discussing how they apply to modern problems of racism and racial and ethnic prejudice. The objectives of this component are:

a. To learn the content of biblical texts that relate to issues of racial, ethnic, and nationalistic bigotry.

b. To learn the ancient historical and cultural context of those biblical texts in order to be able to evaluate the modern use of the Bible in matters of race relations.

2. An experiential component (approx. 10%), which will entail shared experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Examples include visits to local museums, exhibitions, and seminars and guest speakers or panelists in the classroom. The objective of this component is to cultivate the ability to listen sympathetically to and to see things from the perspective of a person of another racial/ethnic identity.

3. A service-learning component (approx. 30%), which will entail working with a local agency in some effort of racial reconciliation. The objectives of this component are:

a. To become aware of the efforts toward racial reconciliation ongoing in Memphis

b. To observe the difficulties faced by such efforts

c. To reflect on and evaluate such efforts in light of the texts in the Bible

The service-learning component is described in greater detail below.

Texts:

1. The Bible in a modern translation. The NOAB (New Oxford Annotated Bible - Revised Standard Version) will be used in class, and most students have it from previous classes. Other versions are permissible, but please do not use The Living Bible, Today's English Version, or other comparable paraphrase.

2. Steven L. McKenzie, *All God's Children: A Biblical Critique of Racism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997).

Evaluation: Final grades for this course will be determined by averaging the following three components.

1. *Quizzes.* Twelve quizzes will be given on the days for which readings are assigned (mostly Mondays). The two lowest grades will be discarded and the other ten averaged to provide the quiz grade. Quizzes missed because of absence or tardiness may not be made up.

2. *Final exam.* A single exam over the readings and class discussions will be given on Nov. 23.

3. *Presentation and paper.* Describing, evaluating, and reflecting on the service-learning experience.

Additional assignments. All students are required to visit the Civil Rights Museum and to attend at least one meeting of either the BSA or STARR at some time during the semester. Each student must turn in a one-page reaction to each of these experiences. Students who fail to comply will be charged with an additional absence for each experience they miss.

Extra Credit - You may gain 1 point to be added to the exam grade for each news item (newspaper, magazine, internet, etc.) relating to race and religion that you bring to me. You may gain up to 5 points for each such item that you present to class.

Policies:

Attendance, preparation, and participation. Students are expected to read each day's assignment before class, to attend all class sessions, and to participate in class. Participation does not mean dominating class discussion but rather entails attentiveness and the contribution of appropriate observations, opinions, and questions. I reserve the right to adjust a student's final grade up or down based on what I regard as excessive absences or preparation for and participation in class (or lack thereof).

Late papers will not be accepted.

Calendar: (Note: Students are responsible for reading not only the pages in AGC (= *All God's Children*) but also all biblical passages referred to in AGC)

8/26 Introduction to course

8/28 Two terms (exegesis & hermeneutics) and an exercise

8/31 Genesis 1-11, Read AGC 3-11

9/2 Continue Gen 1-11

9/4 Choose service learning agencies

9/7 Labor Day recess

9/9 Special session on Genesis 4

9/11 Founder's Day Convocation. Short class

_____ Evaluation of journal entry

9/14 Abraham, Read AGC 12-20

9/16 Continue Abraham

9/18 Guest speakers:

9/21 Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, Read AGC 21-30

9/23 Continue Deuteronomy and the DtrH

9/25 Guest speakers:

9/28 Exodus and Conquest, Read AGC 31-39

9/30 Continue Exodus and Conquest

10/2 Guest speakers:

10/5 Ruth, Read AGC 40-49

10/7 Continue Ruth

10/9 Reports on service projects

10/12 Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, Malachi, Read AGC 53-59

10/14 Continue Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles

10/16 Reports on service projects

10/19 Fall recess

10/21 Wisdom, Read AGC 60-68

10/23 Continue Wisdom

10/26 Jonah, Read AGC 69-75

10/28 Continue Jonah

10/30 No class

Mon 11/2 Biblical prophecy, Read AGC 76-83

Wed 11/4 Continue prophecy

Fri 11/6 Luke-Acts, Read AGC 87-97 + 98-109

Mon 11/9 Continue Luke-Acts

Wed 11/11 Writings of John, Read AGC 113-20

Fri 11/13 Continue John

Mon 11/16 Paul, Read AGC 121-32

Wed 11/18 Continue Paul

Fri 11/20 Society of Biblical Literature meeting. No class

Mon 11/23 Final exam

Wed 11/25 Thanksgiving break. No class.

Fri 11/27 Thanksgiving break. No class.

Mon 11/30 Presentations

Wed 12/2 Presentations

Fri 12/4 Presentations

Mon 12/7 Presentations

Wed 12/8 Presentations

Service-learning requirement:

Service-learning fellow: Shantel Vital

Options:

1. In consultation with Prof. McKenzie and Shantel, choose an agency in Memphis involved in racial reconciliation and spend about 20 hours over the course of the semester working with that agency. You may work in teams, but each student is still responsible for spending 20 hours. You should spend about 5 hours learning about the agency, its history, and its programs on racial reconciliation. This is not library research but discussion with employees, volunteers, clients, etc. and reading the agency's literature. The rest of your time with the agency should be divided in the following way: at least 10 hours of "hands-on" activity in service to the agency or in involvement with its efforts at racial reconciliation. Preferably, no more than one-half of this time will be devoted to clerical activities. This time should be allocated throughout the semester rather than occurring all at one time. You must keep a log of your time spent at the agency with a description of your activities. Your service-learning work will be graded on the basis of your log, agency reports, progress reports, and a formal presentation at the end of the semester. You may count up to 5 hours toward the time required to prepare your presentation. Your presentation should of three parts: 1. a description of the agency, its history, and the efforts at racial reconciliation in which you were involved; 2. a critique of the agency and its programs-strengths, weaknesses, problems it faces, etc. and suggestions for improvement; 3. an attempt to relate your experience and/or the agency's work to the Bible or to reflect on the experience and work in light of the Bible; assess the agency's effort to bring the Bible to bear on its motives and practices. The presentation should be about 15 minutes long. Students who choose this option will also write a brief (2-3) page personal reaction paper describing their individual experience and role in the project and expressing what the experience taught them about other races and how it changed or reinforced their viewpoints.

Prospective agencies and projects:

MIFA-Barrier Breakers or Latino Connection

Christ United Methodist Church-workshops, Pyramid Easter service

First Congregational Church-alternative to KKK Spring rally

Good Samaritan Methodist Church

Memphis Race Relations and Diversity Institute

Mississippi Blvd. Christian Church

Centro Hispano de Assistencia Social

Catholic Charities

Temple Israel

Jewish Community Center

2. Either individually or as a group, choose one of the following topics for research. Then make a formal presentation of your research or write a 15-20 page paper on the topic. The goal of your presentation is to make it suitable for use by an agency like the ones named above and/or for exhibit in such an agency. Each presentation must include at least one visual aid.

Sample topics:

The use of the Bible by antebellum, southern clergy

The use of the Bible in white supremacist literature

The Black Bible Chronicles

The use of the Bible in the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.

Biblical references and allusions in Negro spirituals

The use of the Bible in Apartheid literature