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Theology and Praxis of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Spring 2009

Tuesday and Thursday, 3:00-4:20PM

Schlegel Hall, Room 121

This online syllabus should be used to gain a better understanding of the content and focus of a course. The syllabus given out in the class may differ from this online version and its content supersedes that of the online syllabus.

Course Description

This course will explore the theology and witness of Martin Luther King, Jr., establishing King as a major theologian of reconciliation with a global vision. The course will center on the cultural and intellectual resources shaping King's work and his legacy in contemporary society. Fifty years after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, there are renewed and intriguing conversations on King's work and the imprint of the Civil Rights Movement today. The course assumes a comprehensive approach to King's life and thought by considering both the role of the Protestant Liberal tradition and the African American Religious experience in funding his vision of the "beloved community." By reviewing his work, listening to sermons, documentaries, and speeches, we will critically engage the many trajectories of King's legacy, including nonviolence, war and peace, poverty, and the relationship between church and society. Furthermore, students will reflect upon the ways in which King's life and work offers insight into what it means to live faithfully and courageously in the contemporary church and society.

Course Objectives

1. To become acquainted with the theology of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his unique contributions to Christian theology and ethics.
2. To understand the theological and cultural resources that shaped King's theology and witness.
3. To articulate the relationship of King's theology to the broader aims of the Civil Rights Movement and global liberationists efforts.
4. To apply King's theology and vision of community to the ministry of reconciliation, social and economic justice, and peace building in the contemporary church.

Course Requirements

1. **Participation (10%)** involves reading all assigned materials, regular attendance, and active engagement in class discussions and presentations.
2. **Presentation and short papers (30%).** Students will write two short papers (3-5 pages, double spaced). Students will also be required to give one class presentation of an assigned reading to be shared with the class. Presentations should reflect a detailed theological analysis of the reading.

3. **Midterm Take-home Exam (30%)** The midterm take-home exam will be 7-10 pages in length, with a theological analysis and critique of King's thought and witness, reflecting course readings and demonstration of the student's critical engagement with the materials.
4. **Final Essay (30%).** Final papers will be 10-12 pages in length on a topic selected in conversation with the instructor. This paper should reflect a comprehensive understanding of King's thought and witness and its implications for the contemporary church.

Required Text

- Ansbro, John J. *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of A Mind*. New York: Orbis Books, 1994.
- Baldwin, Lewis V., 1991, *There Is A Balm in Gilead: The Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (Mineapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress).
- Dyson, Michael Eric, *April 4, 1968: Martin Luther King Jr's Death and How It Changed America* (New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 2008).
- King, Jr., Martin Luther, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, **James M. Washington ed**, (San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco 1986)
- King, Jr., Martin Luther, 1968, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community*, (Beacon Press).
- King, Jr., Martin Luther. *Strength to Love*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.
- Roberts, J. Deotis, 2005, *Bonhoeffer and King: Speaking Truth To Power*, (Westminster Press).
- Ross, Rosetta, 2003, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press).

Recommended Texts

- Cone, James, 2000, *Malcolm & Martin & America: A Dream or A Nightmare?*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press).
- Hill, Johnny B., *The Theology of Martin Luther King Jr. and Desmond Mpilo Tutu* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). **Available directly through Professor Hill*
- Marsh, Charles, 1999, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights*, (Princeton University Press).
- Smith, Kenneth, and Zepp, Ira G., 1998, *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press).

Outline and Schedule

Part I—King's Cultural and Religious Experience

Date	Subject/Assignment
Tues. 2/5	Introduction
Thurs 2/10	Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King, Jr. Baldwin, pp. 15-90; Washington, pp. 1-20
Tues 2/12	Role of the Black Church and African American Religious Experience

T	2/17	“Hearing God of History”—Philosophical and Theological Influences	Baldwin, pp. 91-228; Washington, pp. 5-72 Baldwin, pp. 229-339; Washington, pp.14-131; Ansbro, pp. 1-34
TH	2/19	Quest for Human Dignity	Washington, pp. 135-188; Ansbro, pp. 37-106
T	2/24	Nonviolence and Civil Disobedience	Washington, pp. 189-258; Ansbro, pp. 110-160
TH	2/26	“Love Ethic of Jesus”	Washington, pp. 259-327; Ansbro, pp. 163-250

Part II—King’s Theological and Philosophical Ideals

T	3/3	Search for the Beloved Community	Strength to Love, pp. 1-51; Where Do We Go From Here, pp. 1-25
TH	3/5	King and the Black Power Movement	STL, pp. 58-93; WDWGFH, pp. 27-121
T	3/10	King and Women in the Movement	STL, pp. 101-135; WDWFGH, pp. 159-223
TH	3/12	Women and the Civil Rights Movement	Ross, ch. 1-3
T	3/17	Women and the Civil Rights Movement (Cont.)	Ross, ch. 4-6

Part III—Exploring King’s Idea of the Beloved Community

TH	3/19	King in the Age of Religious Pluralism	*Blackboard reading
T	3/24	Research and Study Week	
TH	3/26	Research and Study Week	
T	3/31	King and Bonhoeffer	Roberts, ch. 1-9
TH	4/2	King and Bonhoeffer	Roberts, ch. 10-14

T	4/7	King Among the Theologians (Tutu, Gandhi, Dorothy Day, etc.)	
TH	4/9	Easter Recess	
T	4/14	The Beloved Community as a Global Ethic	*Blackboard reading
TH	4/16	King in the Global Context	*Blackboard reading
T	4/21	The Assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and Its Current Meaning	Dyson, ch. 1-3
TH	4/23	Dream or Nightmare?: America After King's Death	Dyson, 4-10
T	4/28	King and Contemporary Racial Politics in America	*Blackboard reading
TH	4/30	Impact on the Christian Church	*Blackboard reading
T	5/5	King and Globalization: Then and Now	*Blackboard reading
TH	5/7	Last Day of Classes--Review	

Supplemental Bibliography

Ansbro, John J. *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of A Mind*. New York: Orbis Books, 1994.

Baldwin, Lewis V. *Toward the Beloved Community: Martin Luther King, Jr. and South Africa*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1995.

Bishop, Jim. *The Days Of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1971.

Branch, Taylor. *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988.

Branch, Taylor. *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

Carson, Clayborne (ed.). *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume I: Called To Serve*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Carson, Clayborne (ed.). *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume II: Rediscovering Precious Values*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Carson, Clayborne (ed.). *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume III: The Birth of A New Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Cone, James, 2000, *Malcolm & Martin & America: A Dream or A Nightmare?*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press).

Downing, Frederick L. *To See the Promised Land: The Faith Pilgrimage of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986.

Garrow, David J. *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.* New York: Vintage Books, 1986.

King, Coretta Scott. *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: New Market Press, 1987.

King, Jr., Martin Luther. *Strength to Love.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.

King, Jr., Martin Luther. *Why We Can't Wait.* New York: The New American Library, 1964.

Marsh, Charles, 1999, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights*, (Princeton University Press).

Miller, Keith D. *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Its Sources.* New York: The Free Press, 1992.

Moldovan, Russell. *Martin Luther King, Jr.: An Oral History of His Religious Witness and His Life.* San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1999.

Raines, Howell. *My Soul Is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977.

Reddick, L.D. *Crusader Without Violence: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1959.

Ross, Rosetta, 2003, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press).

Smith, Ervin. *The Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1981.

Washington, James Melvin. *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power.* Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986.

Williams, John A. *The King God Didn't Save: Reflections on the Life and Death of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1970.

Youth of the Rural Organizing and Cultural Center. *Minds Stayed on Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle in the Rural South, An Oral History.* Colorado: Westview Press, 1991.