

Black World Religion

THEO 276 (BWS XXX)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

"In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). In 1890 Afro-Caribbean scholar Edward Blyden adds, "If we live and move and have our being in Him, God also lives and moves and has His being in us," suggesting that each culture, race, and ethnic group reflects an image of the divine that no one else can duplicate. This course explores the revelatory manner in which the divine comes to unique presence and expression among African peoples throughout human history. It will examine the religious experiences and traditions of: Africa's ancient Nile valley civilizations, long recognized as cradling the world's spiritual and philosophical wisdom and as influencing the formative development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; indigenous Africans before and after European colonialism; and African descended peoples in the Americas during their centuries long liberation struggle to resist and overcome slavery, institutionalized racism, and white supremacy. The primary sources include the literary works of indigenous African and African descended religious writers, leaders, and theologians. The course also employs a combination of secondary sources and audio-visual materials.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge: Through summarization of the content presented, students will demonstrate their knowledge of African peoples' religious experiences within their various historical and cultural contexts and the distinctly expressive symbols, images, metaphors, myths, rituals, dramas, songs, dances, moral virtues, spiritual truths, and liberation movements which their original and ongoing faith experiences have inspired in history.

Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions: Through critical analysis of the rich diversity that characterizes the global community of African peoples, students will, in James Cone's words, "probe its history deep into its African roots and ask about the relationship between the African shout and the Baptist moan, the river Jordan in the spirituals and the river spirits of West African religion," and recognize the various influences which essential African cultural and spiritual traditions played in the survival and liberation struggle of African descended peoples in the Americas.

The Value of Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World: Through class discussions and personal reflection papers, students will draw applicable and illuminating parallels that exist between their own experiences of spiritual uplift, meaning, inspiration, enlightenment, empowerment, liberation, etc. and the faith experiences of the African peoples presented and discussed in our class.

EXPECTATIONS:

1. Attendance: Since much of the subject matter will be presented in lectures, audio-visual presentations, and discussions in class, it is most important to faithfully attend every class on time and throughout its duration.

2. Tests: There will be two tests - a mid-term exam and a final exam. The exams will be composed of both essay and true/false questions.

3. Quizzes: 8 surprise quizzes will be given throughout the semester. I will average your 6 highest quiz scores, and drop your 2 lowest quiz scores. Quiz questions will focus on the assigned reading materials for that class and on the material presented during the previous class. No make-ups of missed quizzes.

4. Personal Reflection Papers: You are expected to write a personal reflection paper (5-6 pages, typed in double space, using MLA citation parentheses when appropriate), and submit this paper (hard copy) to me in class during week 12. Late papers will be penalized a whole letter grade. No late paper will be accepted after our last class. When grading your paper, I evaluate not only what you compose (content, i.e., your insightful connections and applications of the course material to your own personal experiences) but also how you compose it (expression, i.e., your sentence structure, word usage, grammar, spelling, typos, etc.). Both components (content and expression) are weighted equally. See pp. 6-8 for possible topics.

5. Grading: The final grade will be determined by four things: reflection paper, mid-term exam, quiz average, and final exam. All four are of equal weight. Numeric grades and letter grades correspond as follows:

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|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| A = 95 - 100 | B = 86 -- 88 | C = 77 -- 79 | |
| A- = 92 - 94 | B- = 83 -- 85 | C- = 74 -- 76 | D = 65 -- 70 |
| B+ = 89 - 91 | C+ = 80 -- 82 | D+ = 71 -- 73 | F = 0 - 64 |

6. Students with Disabilities: If you have a disability and need to request accommodations, please contact me and Services for Students with Disabilities (Sullivan Center Suite 260) as soon as possible to arrange appropriate accommodations.

7. Penalty for Dishonesty: Where there is clear evidence of dishonesty while taking a quiz or exam or while writing your paper, the corresponding quiz, exam, or paper submitted will receive an "F."

8. Texts: A packet of articles available in Loyola's (LSC) bookstore.

CONTENT AND SCHEDULE**Weeks 1-2: The African Experience of God in a Multicultural World**

objective: to gain insights into the foundational role of religious experience in the institutionalization of religion, the major influence which the dominant White culture of the West has exercised in shaping particularly the Christian religion's institutional forms of expression (e.g., its doctrines, creeds, values, symbols, art, architecture, modes of worship, etc.), and the subsequent need to advance within our diverse global community a culturally polycentric world Christianity that welcomes and honors the unique and complementary cultural perspectives, understandings, practices, and traditions of African peoples.

Robert E. Hood, "Must God Remain Greek?" African Philosophy: An Anthology (1998) pp. 462-67.

Johann B. Metz, "The 'One World': A Challenge to Western Christianity," Christ and Context (1993), pp. 210-19.

Edward W. Blyden, "The African Problem and the Method of Its Solution," African Repository (July, 1890): 65-79.

W.E.B. Du Bois, The Conservation of Races (1897).

Gayraud Wilmore, "What is African American Christianity?" Down by the Riverside (2000), pp. 26-30.

Peter J. Paris, "Africa: Revolution in Understanding," The Spirituality of African Peoples (1995), pp. 1-26.

James H. Cone, "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 55 (2001): 1-14.

James H. Cone, "Black Theology as an Attack on White Religion," For My People, pp. 31-52.

Week 3-4: Reconciling Differences: An African Way of Thinking

objective: to gain insights into the African system of complementary logic by examining its application to various situations in which opposites seem contradictory and irreconcilable: monotheism and polytheism, true religion and false religion, orthodoxy and heresy, sacred and profane, the spirituals and the blues, spirit and matter, body and soul, integration and separation, Martin and Malcolm. This African system of polyvalent logic that conceives of reality in categories and terms of "both/and" rather than "either/or" can lead to a creative harmonizing of different perspectives and approaches.

Erik Hornung, Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many (1982), pp. 15-32, 236-259.

Jan Assmann, "The Mosaic Distinction," Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism (2008), pp. 127-45.

Maulana Karenga, "Black Religion," Introduction to Black Studies (1993), pp. 211-266.

James Cone, Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare (New York: Orbis, 1991), pp. 1-16, 244-53.

Lee Butler, "The Spirit Is Willing and the Flesh Is Too: Living Whole and Holy Lives through Integrating Spirituality and Sexuality," Loving the Body (2004), pp. 111-120

Paul Ricoeur, "Wonder, Eroticized and Enigma," Sexuality and Identity (1970), pp. 13-24.

Malgorzata Oleszkiewicz-Peralba, The Black Madonna in Latin America and Europe: Tradition and Transformation (2007), selected pages.

Week 5-6: Power of the Word in African Religious Thought

objective: to gain insights into the "magic power of the word" as experienced and exercised by African peoples. Referring to the West African philosophical concept of

Nommo, Janheinz Jahn (1961) states, "According to African philosophy man has, by the force of his word dominion over things. He can change them, make them work for him and command them." The practice of *Nommo* includes black music and song, that which W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) calls the "the most beautiful expression of human experience" and "the greatest gift of the Negro people."

Marcel Griaule, "The Dogon Creation Narrative," *African Intellectual Heritage: A Book of Sources* (1996), pp. 41-44 [excerpted from *Conversations with Ogotemmel: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas* (1965).

"The Memphite Theology of Creation" (Shabaka Stone), *Numen* 23 (1976): 81-82

"The Eloquent Peasant" *Ancient Egyptian Literature* 1 (1975), pp. 169-84.

Benjamin C. Ray, "Ashanti New Year," *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* (1976, pp.97-98.

Frederick Douglass, "Great is the Miracle of Human Speech," *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews* (1978) 5:474-77.

Erik Hornung, "Introduction," *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Underworld* (2005), pp. 7-27.

"The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" *Ancient Egyptian Literature* 1 (1975), pp. 211-214

Lerone Bennett, Jr., "Sojourner Truth: A Black Woman in Battle," *Pioneers in Protest* (1968), pp. 115-130

Allison Davis, "Douglass, the Lion," *Leadership, Love, and Aggression* (1983), pp. 15-41.

Judith Nies, "Fannie Lou Hamer and the Freedom Songs," *Nine Women: Portraits from the American Radical Tradition* (2002), pp. 219-20.

Angela Y. Davis, "Black Women and Music: A Historical Legacy of Struggle", *Wild Women in the Whirlwind* (1990), select pages.

Frederick Douglass, "The Songs of the Slave Represent the Sorrow of His Heart," *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1960), pp. 36-38.

Paul Robeson, "Negro Spirituals Are 'The Soul of the Race Made Manifest,'" *The Spectator* (June 1934), pp. 916-17.

James Cone, "Black Spirituals: A Theological Interpretation," *Risks of Faith* (1999), pp. 13-27.

Week 7: Midterm Exam

Weeks 8-9: The Descent into the Netherworld: the African Wisdom of "Working the Earth of the Heart"

objective: to gain insights into the African wisdom of living an examined life. The rock hewn African churches in the mountains of Lalibela (in Ethiopia) are powerful architectural symbols which embody a liberating African truth, namely, that the divine is encountered not over and above our most down to earth human experiences, but in the depths of them. Those who descend into these sacred subterranean structures

encounter the divine. Similarly, those who descend into the earth of their hearts (i.e., explore their inner depths) open themselves up to encounter the divine at ever deeper levels, and to experience ever more fully the inner freedom, strength, peace, wisdom, compassion, and passion for justice which this divine encounter imparts.

"The Book of Knowing the Creations of Re and of Overthrowing Apophis" (Papyrus Bremner Rhind 26:21-27:5) translated by John A. Wilson, Ancient Near Eastern Texts (1958).

First Sahidic Life of Pachomius translated by Armand Veilleux (1980), Chapters 6-9.

Besa, Life of Shenoute, translated by David Bell (1983), Chapters 3-4

Athanasius, Life of Anthony translated by Robert Gregg (1980), Chapters 7-10.

Howard Thurman, Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death (1975), pp. 65-76, 89-93.

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Why Jesus Called a Man a Fool," A Knock at Midnight (1998), pp. 145-64.

James Cone, "Martin Luther King: The Source of His Courage to Face Death," Martyrdom Today (1983), pp. 74-79.

Erik Hornung, "The Discovery of the Unconscious in Ancient Egypt" Spring (Spring 1986): 16-28.

Wole Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy," Myth, Literature, and the African World (1976), pp.

Ayi Kwei Armah, "Substance- Myth as a Cultural Resource," Eloquence of the Scribes (2006): pp. 249-262.

Olukoya Ogen, "Historicizing African Contributions to the Emancipation Movement: The Haitian Revolution, 1791-1805" [<http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/5684/2/TheHaitianRevolution1791-1805.pdf>]

Weeks 10-11: Rejected Stones as Chief Cornerstones: Bearing Prophetic Witness to Love, Truth, and Justice and Breaking the Escalating Cycle of Violence

objective: to gain insights into the manner in which African peoples have creatively wrestled with their historical experiences of death in all of its forms (the social death of slavery and colonialism, the civic death of Jim Crow and apartheid, the psychic death of self-hate, and the spiritual death of despair), tapped a life-giving power present in these painful experiences, and used it to rise from suffering and death as ones who were victimized but who do not victimize.

Cornel West, "The Gifts of Black Folk in the Age of Terrorism" [transcribed from a talk given at Princeton University in 2006; <http://www.learnoutloud.com>].

Edward W. Blyden, "The Call of Providence to the Descendants of Africa in America," Liberia's Offering (1862), pp. 67-91.

Albert Raboteau, "Exodus, Ethiopia, and Racial Messianism," Many Are Chosen (1994), pp. 175-95.

Iris Schmeisser, "'Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands': Ethiopianism, Egyptomania, and the Arts of the Harlem Renaissance," African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination (2004), pp. 263-283.

Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela (1995) pp. 620-25.

Fiona Ross, "Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation commission in South Africa" (2002).

Desmond Tutu, "No Future without Forgiveness" (2000).

Vincent Harding, "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Black Messianic Vision," Black Titan: W.E.B. Du Bois (1970), pp. 52-66.

Herbert Kohl, "The Story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott," Should We Burn Babar? Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories (1995), pp. 30-56.

Weeks 12-13: "Freedom in Bondage" and "Freedom from Bondage"

objective: to gain insights into the spiritual strivings of African peoples to be hopeful in situations that seem utterly hopeless, to love in the face of hate, to find joy in the midst of misery, to exercise an inner freedom amidst the absence of external freedom, to affirm one's humanity and dignity amidst oppressive systems that deny them.

"The People Could Fly," The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales, told by Virginia Hamilton (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), pp. 166-73.

Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Sympathy" American Negro Poetry (1963), pp. 13-14.

Maya Angelou, "Caged Bird," Poems (1986), pp. 182-83.

Cecil Cone, "The Black Religious Experience," Theology and Body, ed. John Y. Fenton (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 82-85.

Gayraud Wilmore, "Black Theology," Best Black Sermons, ed. W. Philpot (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1972), pp. 87-94.

Malcolm X, Autobiography of Malcolm X (1964), pp.152-73.

Weeks 14-15: Reading the Bible through the Lenses of Black Faith

objective: to gain insights into the hermeneutical advantages that accrue to those who read the scriptures from the margins of the social, economic, and political order.

Vincent L. Wimbush, "African Americans and the Bible: A Meeting of Worlds," Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy (1998), pp. 197-98.

James Cone, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology," For My People, pp. 53-78.

James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Lippincott, 1970, pp. 203-09.

Cain Hope Felder, "Cultural Ideology, Afrocentrism, and the Bible," *Black Theology: A Documentary History 2* (1993), pp. 184-95.

Joseph Enuwosa, "African Cultural Hermeneutics: Interpreting the New Testament in a Cultural Context," *Black Theology: An International Journal 3* (2005): 88-98.

Katie Geneva Cannon, "Slave Ideology and Biblical Interpretation," *The Recovery of Black Presence* (1995), pp. 119-128.

Writing Your Personal Reflection Papers

The following topics serve as springboards to help direct and focus your reflections on personal experiences that are most meaningful or engaging to you:

Topic One

As reflected in our class readings and discussions, Martin Luther King's mother served as an enlightened witness to six year old Martin when he felt painfully rejected by his two white playmates. Through her timely and informative intervention, she enabled Martin to "elevate his view" of the wrong done to him, come to terms with his pain and outrage, and subsequently grow inwardly free and strong enough to stand up to racism. The African seer Toby did the same for the slaves who could fly, as did Elijah Muhammad for Malcolm X. Enlightened witnesses in our lives enable us to see that the reason we are mistreated or neglected is not because there is something wrong with us, but because there is something terribly wrong with those who are mistreating or neglecting us. From a faith perspective, enlightened witnesses speak the truth that sets us free, and thereby manifest the saving presence of the divine in our lives. Identify an enlightened witness in your own life who has played a significant role in "elevating your view" of painful wrongs you have suffered. Describe the specific ways that person helped you, and draw any relevant parallels that exist between your personal experience of an enlightened witness and those encountered by Martin Luther King, the slaves who could fly, and Malcolm X.

Topic Two

Describe a critical situation in your own life where you where you followed your conscience, stood up for what you believed was right, just, and true, and in the midst of the painful consequences you suffered, you felt spiritually centered, strengthened, and consoled. Discuss the circumstances of that situation, the courageous way you felt impelled to respond to it, the painful consequences you suffered as a result, and the spiritual benefits you derived from that experience. Draw any relevant parallels that exist between your personal experience and the experiences of Khun Anup, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Muhammad Ali, etc.

Topic Three

In Martin Luther King's "kitchen experience," he encountered Jesus as "that Power that makes a way out of no way." When Martin felt there was "no way" he could be strong enough to continue to lead the bus boycott, that divine power made "a way out of no way" for him. By facing, admitting, and confessing out loud to God his feelings of weakness, Martin opened himself up to experience Christ's transforming power. Martin's feelings of weakness were transformed into feelings of strength. Describe an experience in your own life in which you too encountered the divine as that Power that makes a way out of no way (i.e., that makes something honorable come out of something shameful, something positive come out of something negative, something good come out of something bad, some gain

come out of some loss, etc.). As you describe your personal experience, use our class material to draw applicable parallels and incorporate illustrative quotes.

Topic Four

Using Karen Horney's Interpretive Model for Understanding Resistance to Oppression and our class discussions on the Deadly Manifestations of Repressed Rage, describe a turning point in your life which parallels in some ways the "psychic conversions" experienced by Malcolm X, Sojourner Truth, or Frederick Douglass. A "psychic conversion" happens whenever we cooperate with our inner divine impulse to forge our own separate identities, become our own persons, and embrace the truth of who we really are as unique individuals. This impulse to individuate impels us to think our own thoughts, to feel our own feelings, speak our own minds, follow the dictates of our hearts, make our own decisions, and live our own lives regardless of how different and unpopular such choices may render us. Compare or contrast your experience with the religious leaders discussed in our class, incorporating into your description quotes or examples from the readings which help illuminate your personal journey from repression and self-alienation to expression and self-realization.

Topic Five

The Christian gospels portray Jesus as one who breaks the escalating cycle of violence and abuse which threatens to destroy our world. Although victimized by violence and abuse, Jesus did not victimize or abuse others. Because he dared to creatively process his feelings of hurt and anger and openly grieve his pain, he was able to pass through and rise from his hellish situation of being rejected without rejecting others. He was in the words of Psalm 118:22, "the stone rejected by the builders (of the old unjust and violent world order) who had become the chief cornerstone (of a new world order in which justice and peace reign)." He was the "suffering servant" who loved those who hated him, blessed those who cursed him, and prayed for those who despitefully used him. Albert Raboteau argues that, like Jesus, blacks who have long been rejected by the builders of Western society share in Christ's divine destiny and messianic mission to serve as the chief cornerstone of a new society in which no one is rejected. The Kingdom of God on earth is best established by "those who were oppressed but did not oppress, those who were enslaved but did not enslave, those who were hated but did not hate." Describe a situation in your own life where you identify with the rejected stone and its struggle to creatively pass through and rise from the hellish pain of being rejected without rejecting others. Draw relevant and illuminating parallels that may exist between your experiences and those of Jesus or any of the other historical figures discussed in our class.

Topic Six

Robin Kelley insightfully remarks, "Race is never just a matter of how you look, it's about how people assign meaning to how you look." In other words, in American society a black person's physical features (dark skin, woolly hair, etc.) have long functioned as indelible symbols embodying a pattern of racist meanings. As symbols, these features automatically trigger unconsciously within many Americans white racist assumptions about that black person. These unconscious or tacit assumptions tend to "inferiorize" that black person's intelligence, morality, competence, reliability, trustworthiness, and skills and thus render him/her less worthy of other people's respect. Describe your own experience of white racism, its personal impact upon you while growing up, and the particular ways you have chosen to order your life, thinking, relationships, work, etc. in response to your experience. Incorporate into your personal reflections illustrative quotes and parallels from our course material that illuminate your experience.

