

Theological Foundations for Urban Ministry

Mo Leverett – Professor

Class Syllabus

In light of God's redemptive work towards us, this course will seek to responsively explore the biblical framework and template for the church's mission in the city and especially among the poor. In other words, and stated more generally, we will pursue the biblical pattern and blueprint for the Christian life in a fallen world. We will explore the nature of God's work and its implication for our own work in the world, especially in the context of the American city and against the backdrop of racial injustice and inequalities.

We will attempt to enter into a better understanding of the biblical mandates that flow out of an understanding of the gospel as God's work in the world. We will explore in an introductory manner the biblical themes of the Kingdom of God, the biblical poverty mandate, justice and mercy, faith and works, the gospel and race, and the lost art of redemptive suffering. We will explore all of these things focusing primarily on the existential context of the American South and Urban America. However, it is intended that the theological motifs and the tools of social exegesis that we will learn to be applicable to more than a single context.

We will also briefly look at appropriate and effective contemporary models for the implication of these principles in a holistically redemptive way. Special attention will be given to personal and spiritual cultivation of the student in preparation for his or her own appointed task.

This class should not be looked at as a class for future urban ministry leaders alone. On the contrary, it is pastors of the resourced community that would benefit most from a careful study of these issues, not only to be able to understand and appreciate the urban ministry mindset, but also to discover the theological short-sightedness of the church at large in dealing with these issues.

Objectives

1. To understand the biblical imperatives of the authentic Christian life.
2. To experience personal transformation and theoretical preparation toward our pursuit of becoming worthy ambassadors of the gospel in urban pockets of poverty.
3. To understand what is the appropriate Christian response to the gospel and to explore innovative and theologically sound solutions to the contemporary urban crisis in America.
4. To understand in a cursory way the dynamics of the inner-city of America in order to become more capable of gospel application in that particular context.

Course Requirements

Texts: The idea behind the selection of these texts is to provide you with the tools for social interaction, brief exposure to Christian thinking about the themes we will discuss and to provide you a spectrum of perspectives for personal stimulus. There is not much written in our theological circles along these lines so that text selection is more arduous and reading and weaving your way through these selections is also more arduous. It is unfortunate that secularists are thinking and reflecting a great deal more than we are about the context of the urban environment and its many challenges. Perhaps some of you will begin to turn this around.

1. Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy, Anchor Books 1969, 90
2. Richard Wright, Native Son, Perennial Classics, 1998
3. James Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, Orbis Books, 1990
4. Chris Rice, Grace Matters, Jossy-Bass, 2002

You will also be required to watch three movies after class. These movies are:

1. Amistad
2. Mississippi Burning
3. Menace to Society

Each of these required readings should be summarized in at least a half-page of personal reaction to its content. One should be able to answer the question of how this reading or this writer's perspective has influenced your way of thinking about your Christian responsibility. These summaries should be handed in before you leave New Orleans.

Application Project:

Option 1: An 8 page paper on at least one theme relating to God's Kingdom building enterprise in the inner-city. This paper should weave exegetical, theological and sociological elements and should integrate at least 4 other thinkers than your own.

Option 2: Three thoughtful interviews with urban ethnic pastors with your own interactive summary at the end. This interview should be theological, sociological in perspective exploring the unique theological framework and perspective of these pastors. This can be turned in on video or in paper form. The student is seeking to learn from these pastors and should not be attempting to promote some pet personal theological agenda.

Option 3: An interview with at least 3 leading (churches of 300 or more) evangelical pastors on the failures of the church in the areas we have discussed. One should allow them to flesh out their own perspectives and reflect with them the issues we discuss in class. You should log their comments and perspectives both and their suggested solutions to the urban crisis. It should conclude with the student's assessment of the theology of the church today and its capacity for implementing God's Kingdom priorities.

Option 4: An alternative project that the student and professor agree upon before the end of the class schedule.

Grades will be determined as follows:

10% Book & Movie Summaries

15% Class participation: This will be determined by your thoughtful participation and teachable spirit in the classroom experience.

40% Application Project: The creativity and excellence of your project will determine your grade. This should be turned in within 3 weeks after the class is ended.

35% Exam: An exam will be handed out on the last day of class. This test should be done within 3 days after the class and mailed to my ministry office or e-mailed directly to the professor.