Dangerous and Redemptive Memories:
Theologies and Practices of Remembering Suffering

2017-18 Course Development Application
Center for Christian Thought at Biola University

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Course Syllabus

“It is no accident that the destruction of memory is a typical measure taken by totalitarian governments. People’s subjugation begins when their memories are taken away. Every colonization takes its principle here. And every resistance to oppression is nourished by the subversive power of remembered suffering. The memory of suffering is always standing up against the modern cynicism of power politics.”
~Johann Baptist Metz, Faith in History and Society

“Christians believe . . . that neither what we do nor what we suffer defines us at the deepest level. Though the way we think of and treat ourselves and the way others think of and treat us does shape our identity, no human being can make or unmake us. Instead of being defined by how human beings relate to us, we are defined by how God relates to us. We know that fundamentally we are who we are, as unique individuals standing in relation to our neighbors and broader culture because God loves us – to such a great extent that on the cross Jesus Christ, God incarnate, shouldered our sin and tasted our suffering.”
~Miroslav Volf, The End of Memory

Course Description

This course explores practices of remembering suffering that have redemptive potential for persons and entire communities, especially in contexts of historical violence and marginalization. We will begin with case studies of three particular contexts – Ecclesial Base Communities in El Salvador, the Liberian civil war and its aftermath, and African American communities in the U.S. South. These case studies raise important theological and pastoral questions about how remembering suffering endured in the past may or may not contribute to healing, enduring present suffering with hope, and working towards life abundant for all. With the case studies in mind, we will reflect theologically on the meaning and appropriateness of practices of remembering suffering for not only the suffering community, but also communities that have been complicit in the perpetration of violence and oppression. Particular attention will be paid to how remembering suffering correlates theologically with the Christian memory of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Students will conclude the course with a final project that combines theological reflection and pastoral creativity aimed at transformative practices of remembering suffering in their own respective contexts.
Course Objectives
By the end of this course, students will:
• Become familiar with practices of remembering suffering enacted in three particular contexts: Christian Base Communities of El Salvador, Liberian women during and in the aftermath of Liberia’s civil wars, and African American communities in the U.S. South;
• Engage with perspectives in trauma studies and memory studies as interdisciplinary resources for critical theological reflection on the memory of suffering;
• Appreciate the theological, social, political, and psychological effects of occluding past suffering, especially in historically marginalized communities;
• Consider the destructive and violent potential of remembering past suffering;
• Reflect theologically on the redemptive potential of remembering suffering, especially in light of Christian practices of remembering the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ;
• Consider the respective roles of victims and victimizers in the memory of suffering, and interrogate the appropriateness of this dichotomy;
• Propose and critically analyze a transformative pastoral practice of remembering suffering for students’ own ecclesial and social contexts.

Required Textbooks

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Week 1  Introduction to the Course, Students, Professor
Participatory Exercise:
• Bring and discuss examples of forgotten stories of suffering
Remembering and Revenge:

Week 2  Case Study #1: Ecclesial Base Communities of El Salvador
Historical Memory
• Film: Innocent Voices. Directed by Luis Mandoki, 2008.
• Film: Return to El Salvador. Directed by Jamie Moffett, 2010.

Week 3  Case Study #1: Ecclesial Base Communities of El Salvador
Practices of Remembering Suffering

- Youtube videos of practices that commemorate massacres
- Artwork and music commemorating atrocities of the Salvadoran Civil War
- Written, video, and artistic testimonies of base community members from Cacaopera, Morazan (collected and translated as a part of this course development grant)

**Week 4**  
**Case Study #2: Women Peacemakers of Liberia**  
**Historical Memory**


**Week 5**  
**Case Study #2: Liberian Women in the United States**  
**Practical Theological Reflection**


**Week 6**  
**Case Study #3: African American Communities in the U.S. South**  
**Historical Memory**

Excerpts from:


**Week 7**  
**Case Study #3: African American Communities in the U.S. South**  
**Practices of Remembering Suffering**

- Film: *Roots*. Directed by Phillip Noyce, et. al., 2016.
- Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, website, [https://nmaahc.si.edu/](https://nmaahc.si.edu/)

**Week 8**  
**Resources for Critical Reflection: Trauma Studies**

Excerpts from:

Week 9 Resources for Critical Reflection: Memory Studies
Excerpts from:

Week 10 Resources for Theological Reflection: Johann Baptist Metz: The Dangerous Memory of Suffering

Week 11 Resources for Theological Reflection: Miraslov Volf: The Dangers of Remembering Suffering

Week 12 Resources for Theological Reflection: Remembering Suffering, Rethinking Theodicy
Excerpts from:

Week 13 Resources for Theological Reflection: Remembering Christ, Remembering the Crucified People
Excerpts from:
Week 14  **Resources for Theological Reflection:**
**Remembering Humanity: The Communion of Saints**
Excerpts from:

Week 15  **Resources for Theological Reflection:**
**Remembering, Redeeming, and Remaining**

**Assignments and Evaluation**
- In-class participation (20%)
- Weekly reading reflections/book reviews (40%)
- Final project: pastoral plan and research paper (40% total)