

Dangerous and Redemptive Memories: Theologies and Practices of Remembering Suffering

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

Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo
Earley Assistant Professor of Catholic and Latin American Studies
Wake Forest University School of Divinity

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

- Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*. Crossroad, 2007.
- Miraslov Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*. Eerdmans, 2006.
- Annie Hardison-Moody, *When Religion Matters: Practicing Healing in the Aftermath of the Liberian Civil War*. Pickwick Publications, 2016.

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:

- Excerpts from Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. University of California Press, 1998.

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.
- Excerpts from Mark Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote: A Parable of the Cold War*. Vintage Books, 1994.

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

- Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo, "Remembering the Massacre at El Mozote: A Case for the Dangerous Memory of Suffering as Christian Formation in Hope," *International Journal of Practical Theology*, vol. 17/2 (August 2013).
- 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**

- Film: *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*. Directed by Gini Reticker, 2009.
- Leymah Gbowee, *Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer and Sex Changed a Nation at War*. Beast Books, 2013.

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

- Annie Hardison-Moody, *When Religion Matters: Practicing Healing in the Aftermath of the Liberian Civil War*. Pickwick Publications, 2016.

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

Excerpts from:

- Federal Writers Project, *Slave Narratives from North Carolina*. Applewood Books, 2006.
- Ida B. Wells, *On Lynchings*. Dover Publications, 2014.
- Timothy Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name*. Broadway Books, 2005.

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

- Demetria Lucas D'Oyley, "Plantation Tours: Don't Expect to Hear How Bad Slavery Really Was." July 2015. www.theroot.com
- Film: *Roots*. Directed by Phillip Noyce, et. al., 2016.
- Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, website, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/>
- Equal Justice Initiative, Report: *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, Second Edition, 2015. <http://eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america>
- Equal Justice Initiative, Proposed Lynching Memorial. <http://eji.org/national-lynching-memorial>

Week 8 Resources for Critical Reflection: Trauma Studies

Excerpts from:

- Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*. Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Monica J. Casper and Eric Wertheimer, *Critical Trauma Studies: Understanding Violence, Conflict, and Memory in Everyday Life*. NYU Press, 2016.
- Joy Angela Degruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*. Uptone Press, 2005.
- Ibram X. Kendi, "Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome is a Racist Idea," African American Intellectual History Society Website, www.aaihs.org.

Week 9 Resources for Critical Reflection: Memory Studies

Excerpts from:

- Jeffrey Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*. Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and Memory: Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. Princeton University Press, 2003.

Week 10 Resources for Theological Reflection:

Johann Baptist Metz: The Dangerous Memory of Suffering

- Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*. Crossroad, 2007.

Week 11 Resources for Theological Reflection:

Miraslov Volf: The Dangers of Remembering Suffering

- Miraslov Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*. Eerdmans, 2006.

Week 12 Resources for Theological Reflection:

Remembering Suffering, Rethinking Theodicy

Excerpts from:

- Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. Orbis Books, 1987.
- Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity and Hope*. Orbis Books, 2004.

Week 13 Resources for Theological Reflection:

Remembering Christ, Remembering the Crucified People

Excerpts from:

- Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples*. Orbis Books, 2003.
- James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Orbis Books, 2013.
- Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. Orbis Books, 2015.

Week 14 **Resources for Theological Reflection:
Remembering Humanity: The Communion of Saints**

Excerpts from:

- Emilie Townes, ed., *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*. Orbis Books, 1993.
- M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. Fortress Press, 2009.
- Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints*. Bloomsbury, 1999.

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

- Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*. WJK, 2009.
- Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. WJK, 2010.

Assignments and Evaluation

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