

COS 423 – Mission

CLASS DESCRIPTION:

This course introduces the theology and scope of mission, and the pastor's role in leading congregations in their mission as agents of God's transforming redemption.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

1. Articulate a biblical and theological framework for Christian mission.
2. Explain the Wesleyan relationship of personal piety and social holiness.
3. Examine and reflect on unjust social realities and the response of the church locally and globally.
4. Analyze their ministry context and develop strategies for transforming mission.

INSTRUCTOR:

Rev. Craig French

Civic gadfly, granddad extraordinaire, Red Sox fan, bike rider, Acorn TV addict, culinary conscript
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TEXTS:

Dana Robert,	Christian Mission
Miroslav Volf,	A Public Faith
John Wesley,	Selected Sermons
Robert Linthicum,	Transforming Power

Supplemental: Good News to the Poor by Theodore W. Jennings

PREPARATION:

Reading the assigned materials prior to class is essential, both for your own learning and for class discussion. As you read, take particular note of topics that you would like discussed or explained in greater detail, then send me an e-mail with your question(s)--the sooner the better!

As you approach the various writing assignments, you will find a super-abundance of questions to guide your writing. There is no way you can respond in equal depth to all of these questions without making your paper extremely superficial. So find and focus on the questions that seem most central to your thinking, and use the other questions to develop and support your main point(s). Word to the wise: don't skip over questions that refer back to the reading assignments.

EXPECTATIONS:

Paper Format: Times New Roman (or similar), 12 point font, one inch margins all around, double-spaced. All papers should be carefully written and proofread thoroughly, giving attention to neatness, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and the use of inclusive language. Quotations and citations must be documented by endnotes. A suggested resource is the Chicago Manual of Style, a summary sufficient for your use can be found at http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.

Academic Standards: Written assignments will be evaluated in an academic context. Do not use lengthy, verbatim quotes. Plagiarism is a violation of both professional and ethical standards and will not be tolerated.

Submission: Papers are to be submitted in both electronic (Word.doc) and hard copy format, on or prior to the due date, as an e-mail attachment sent to the address above. You do not need to send me a hard copy of the paper due on April 3. Late papers will be penalized. All assignments must be turned in, in order to complete the course.

Grading: Grades will be based on the assigned papers and classroom participation, adhering to the guidelines established by the School. Students will be expected to demonstrate their ability to think creatively, constructively and contextually, plus their familiarity with, mastery of and ability to be conversant with the material in the assigned readings.

SESSION 1 (March 9 - 10, 2018):

Session 1 will focus on the biblical, theological and historic foundations of Christian mission.

Please note: I am intentionally “front-loading” the reading and writing assignments for Session 1, so as to make space for the “Community Research Project” prior to Session 2.

Reading Assignments (to be completed **before** Session 1):

- A Public Faith (Miroslav Volf, 2011, Brazos Press) – All ... especially pp. 77 – 145
- Transforming Power (Robert Linthicum, 2003, InterVarsity Press) – pp. 11 – 128
- Christian Mission (Dana Robert, 2009, Wiley-Blackwell) – All
- Selected Sermons (John Wesley) – Familiarize yourself with Wesley’s sermons and other writings.

Note: I recommend The Essential Works of John Wesley (edited by Alice Russie, 2011, Barbour Publishing). If you already own a different collection of Wesley’s sermons and writings, you are welcome to use that one instead. Most definitely get one that fits your budget.

Writing Assignments for Session 1 (to be completed as noted below):

1. As residents of the United States, we face a social environment that is increasingly diverse and secular, where differing value and belief systems compete for attention, prominence and power. Racism and white privilege – violence – inequality – injustice continue to haunt American society. Concentrated wealth (and power) and concentrated poverty shape the economic and educational opportunities of many (both here and abroad), along with their overall health and well-being. Growing levels of violence and threats of terrorism on the international scene prompt a three-pronged refugee crisis: first, for persons seeking safety and a better life for themselves and their families; second, for Western nations seeking to respond to great humanitarian need, while being wary of adherents of different religious traditions and extremist ideology; and third, a U.S administration determined to reduce immigrant admissions in general and severely curtail admissions from specified countries.

- As a Christian, what is the Church's rightful role in one or more of the above contexts?
- How does the Church proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of a world (and society) that is indifferent to or opposed to Christian truth claims and the Christian vision of a world redeemed and recreated by God's grace?
- Can the Church maintain its singular calling and identity even while pursuing the "common good" in partnership with persons and institutions that have no Christian allegiance to Jesus as Lord? If so, how? If not, why not?
- As a pastor, how might you lead persons in your congregation(s) and in the community at large to deal with one or more of the contentious and thorny issues mentioned above?
- Identify an earlier era or theme of Christian mission (as described in Dana Robert's book) that seems particularly relevant to the present environment for mission and cross-cultural interaction. What can we learn from both the accomplishments and mistakes of that earlier era or focus?

In answering these questions, be sure to cite specific references to

- one or more of John Wesley's sermons or other writings
- Miroslav Volf's book, *A Public Faith*
- Dana Robert's book, *Christian Mission*

Due Date: start of class on Friday, March 9, 2018

Length: 5 – 6 pages

2. Power is something that Christians often are suspicious of and shun. However, according to Robert Linthicum, "Power is always present in all human situations, because power is nothing more than the ability, capacity and willingness of a person, a group of people or an institution (whether it is a church or a nation) to act . . . [which] is, in itself, neither good nor bad. What makes power constructive or destructive is how it is used and for what purpose (that is, whether it is designed to control and dominate people or to enable people to be in charge of their own destinies). Therefore it is important for Christians who are involved in any kind of ministry to have an articulated and acted-out theology of power."

- Do you agree that power is an intrinsic and essential component of all human interaction and institutions? Why or why not?
- What makes power destructive (demonic) or liberating ... domineering or relational?
- Give an example from your own life and ministry of when you saw or experienced power being used (a) abusively (for the benefit of one-sided, select or narrow interests) and (b) creatively (for the common good and the benefit of all, especially the poor and vulnerable).
- What is the relationship between Power and Love? How is this exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus?
- How does this inform your understanding and practice of mission and ministry today?
- How is Linthicum's view of power similar to or different from other interpretations of scripture and the Church's basic purpose (mission) in the world?
- How do Linthicum's ideas challenge, confirm and/or change your own thinking?
- What is the relationship—and distinction—between personal power and institutional power?

Due Date: start of class on Friday, March 9, 2018

Length: 3 – 4 pages

3. Robert Linthicum identifies three systems that form the center of society: religion, economics and politics.

Analyze the community you serve, using the following questions:

- What is the vision of the common good (or shalom) in each of the three systems in your context?
- In what ways are those visions compatible?
In what ways are they incompatible?
If there are differences in the visions, who decides which vision and which values take priority?
- What influence, authority and/or power does each of the three fundamental systems possess?

An alternate way of coming at these questions is to reflect on the aftermath of the 2016 election and the growing polarization that exists across America ... not just between Republican and Democrat, right and left, liberal and conservative ... but between economic interest, social location and moral values. How do you experience these tensions in your own soul? Where do you see them in your congregation(s)? Where do you witness them in your community? Are there any differences between your ideals/preferences/priorities and those of people around you? How do you deal with that dissonance? Are people's world views and "camps" (or "tribes") now so differentiated and fixed that the search for common ground is severely (or fatally) compromised? If so, what is the Church's role as an agent of reconciliation? What is your role as pastor / theologian / mission leader? In what ways do competing truths ("my" truth vs. "your" truth) hamper the possibility of common ground? Use your reflections to begin to answer the questions posed above.

Be as specific as possible in citing concrete events / experiences / examples.

The more specific you are, the easier and clearer your assignment for Session 2 will be.

You will likely find it helpful to begin thinking about this paper—and perhaps even do an outline or first draft—before the March 24 - 25 weekend class session.

Details of the follow-up assignment for Session 2 will be given in class during Session 1 and will build directly on this initial writing assignment.

Due Date: Monday, March 19, 2018 (Noon)

Length: 3 – 4 pages

SESSION 2 (April 13 - 14, 2018)

Session 2 will move from theory to practice, focusing on effective strategies for leading mission in one's own context.

Reading Assignment (to be completed before class session 2):

- Transforming Power (Robert Linthicum, 2003, InterVarsity Press) – pp. 131 – 193

Writing Assignment (to be completed as noted below):

1. Community Research Project (Leading and Organizing Mission):

Details of this special research project will be presented in class during Session 1.

Due Date: Monday, April 9, 2018 (Noon)

Length: 6 – 8 pages