Suffering, Solidarity, and God

There are many types and kinds of call, but the core of the experience is always the same: your soul is awakened, transformed, or exalted, so that instead of dreams and presentiments from within, a summons comes from without—a portion of reality presents itself and makes a claim.

--Hermann Hesse

It is necessary to educate ourselves to endure the unexpected. But it is a terrible thing not to be able to expect. Thus it is necessary to keep together, in one struggling act of the imagination, the expected and the unexpected.

--William Lynch

What is wanting, apparently, is the tragic imagination that... permits great loss to be recognized, suffered and borne, and that makes possible some sort of consolation and renewal... Without the return we may know innocence and horror and grief, but not tragedy and joy.

Not consolation or forgiveness or redemption.

--Wendell Barry

Seminar Description

How ought we to live in a world marked by suffering and injustice? How should we interpret the chance meetings and interconnections that shape our lives? Can such moments help reveal what life is calling us to do and be? How does the religious imagination of the Filipino people approach these issues, especially when faced with pain, violence, and disappointment? This course will begin to address these questions by exploring how people try to find meaning in a world filled with contingency and injustice. Using a variety of sources including philosophical and theological essays, film, and literature, we will examine how one critically engages experiences of interconnection, solidarity, and suffering, and uses such experiences to discern one’s vocation and calling.

The seminar presupposes that students are actively engaged in their praxis communities 14 hours each week, and it seeks to integrate this experience with rigorous philosophical and theological reflection. A central aim of the seminar is to give students the ability to reflect philosophically, theologically, and spiritually on their experience accompanying communities living on the margins of Filipino society, and through this reflection to deepen their understanding of how they might find meaning in life and respond to the call to work for social justice and the common good.
Required Texts

John L’Heureux, *The Shrine at Altamira*
Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*
Course Reader (hereafter designated “[CR]”)

Course Outline

**Part One: Solidarity and Suffering**

**8/16**

**Engaging Questions: Reflection on Orientation**

David Foster Wallace, “David Foster Wallace on Life and Work”

**8/23**

**Faith as Ultimate Confidence: To What Shall We Give our Lives?**

William Lynch, *Images of Faith* (esp. 9-20, 36-9, 125-7) [CR]
H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (esp. 16-23, 116ff.) [CR]
Film: 21 Grams (Shown Monday 8/20 at 8:00pm)

**8/30**

**Confidence Challenged: Can We Invest in a World that Is Unbearably Light?**

Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

**9/6**

**Contingency and Kapwa: Does ‘Chance’ Sometimes Reveal a Call?**

Gabriel Marcel, “The Ontological Mystery” [CR]
Gerald May, “Willingness and Willfulness” (esp. 1-7) [CR]
Katrin de Guia, “Pagkataong Filipino” [CR]
Film: Red (Shown Sunday 9/2 at 8:00pm)

**9/13**

**Justice and Bayanihan: What Ought We To Do?**

Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt 20: 1-16) [CR]
Annette Baier, “The Need for More than Justice” [CR]
Karl Rahner, “On the Question of a Formal Existential Ethic” (esp. 217-229) [CR]

**9/20**

**Encountering and Experience: How Do We Engage Others?**

Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Parts I and II (esp 3-17, 31-34, 51-54, 59-61) [CR]
Film: Thin Red Line (Shown Sunday 9/16 at 7:30pm)

**9/27**

**Awareness and the Artificial Obvious: What Enables Us to See the ‘Real’?**

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, pp. 281-308 [CR]
10/4 Sacramentality and Suffering: How Might Grace Appear in a Fallen World?

Andre Dubus, “Sacraments” [CR]
Film: *The Tree of Life* (Shown Sunday 9/30 at 7:30pm)

Part Two: Suffering and Solidarity

10/11 Questioning God: Can We Make Sense of Suffering?

Stephen Mitchell, *The Book of Job*
Chung Hyun Kyung, “Who is Jesus for Asian Women?” 223-234 [CR]
*The Book of Job* (NRSV translation) [Recommended]

10/18 FALL BREAK

10/25 Recovering Faith: How Do We Reinvest in a World that Breaks our Hearts?

Josef Pieper, *On Hope*, Chapters 1, 3, 4 [CR]

11/1 Embracing Reality: Can We Trust the Finite to Go Somewhere?

William Lynch, “The Definite” pp. 3-18 [CR]
Film: *The Painted Veil* (Shown Sunday 10/28 at 8:00pm)

11/8 Ignatian Discernment: How Do We Discern Where “Reality” is Leading?

Andre Dubus, “A Father’s Story” [CR]
Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment*, pp. 45-54, 78-89, 133-142
Joan Mueller, *Faithful Listening* pp. 102-107, 113-125 [CR/recommended]

11/15 The Experience of Crisis: When Does Suffering Lead to Life?

Tobias Wolff, “In the Garden of the North American Martyrs” [CR]
Film: *The Hours* (Shown Sunday 11/11 at 7:30pm)

11/22 Hope: How Do Others Help Us Find Freedom and Hope?

Gabriel Marcel, “Sketch & Phenomenology of a Metaphysic of Hope” [CR]
Film: *Blue* (Shown Sunday 11/18 at 8:00pm)

11/28 “. . . from what, the pilgrims wondered, had she been saved?”

John L’Heureux, *The Shrine at Altamira*

12/6 Closing Reflections
Course Requirements

1. Class Participation
   Students are expected to attend all classes and to participate actively in class discussions. Active participation requires students not only to contribute their own thoughtful reflections, but also to listen attentively and respectfully to the views of others. To be prepared for our discussions, students must do the reading, watch the films, and (most importantly) reflect on how they might relate to their praxis site, before the date they are scheduled for class discussion. Come to class with questions, reflections and examples from your own experience.

2. Quizzes
   Quizzes may be given from time to time at the discretion of the professor. Quizzes need not be announced in advance, and missed quizzes cannot be made up.

3. Films
   Critically watching films is an essential component of this course. Students are expected to view the films before coming to class. Films will be shown at the times noted on the syllabus. In addition, films may be viewed on the iMac in the Alingal community.

4. Weekly Essays
   As every student knows, class discussions can be less than productive if they are not structured, and the participants are not prepared. To facilitate a fruitful discussion of the texts, each week students will prepare a brief reflection on the readings and turn it in at the beginning of class. Since the purpose of these papers is to facilitate discussion in the seminar, late papers will not be accepted unless the student has made prior arrangements with the professor.
   The paper should adhere to the following pattern: 1) It should begin with a thesis, isolated from the body of the paper, and stated in no more than 20 words. The rest of the essay should develop and demonstrate this thesis based on specific references to the text. 2) The paper is to be no more than one typed page. 3) The precise subject matter or theme for the paper will be specified by a question which will be posed every week in relation to the reading material and films. In short, the thesis and one-page discussion should answer the question posed for the given week. (For examples of the paper style, consult the sample papers.) 4) Papers must be saved as an encrypted PDF on the iMac in Alingal in the Desktop/Classes/Philosophy/Weekly Essays folder by Tuesday at 6:00pm. Directions on how to encrypt your PDF and your password have been emailed to you.

5. Journals & Praxis Integration Paper
   To help you connect the course material to your praxis experience, you are asked to keep a weekly journal. The journal will consist of weekly entries based on class conversations and your work in the community. You should plan to write your reflections after each class. Journals may be collected periodically throughout the quarter.
   Towards the end of the quarter each student will prepare a final paper. The paper will build on the weekly journal entries, and give students the opportunity to creatively synthesize their praxis experience with the course material. Students may meet individually with the professor to develop this assignment which can build on the students’ work in the Praxis seminar or other Casa classes.

Grading

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Essays</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation &amp; Quizzes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal &amp; Praxis Integration</td>
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Following USF’s grading policy, final grades will be reported as follows: **A** – Outstanding; **B** – Superior; **C** – Satisfactory; **D** - Lowest Passing; **F** - Failing (course not counted toward degree requirement). The grades A, B, C, and D may be modified by plus (+) or minus.

**Learning Outcomes**

The seminar will use a variety of philosophical and theological texts to help students articulate and analyze the central issues that arise in their praxis communities. Through in-class discussions, weekly essays, personal journals, and a final synthesis project, the students will achieve the following learning outcomes:

- Demonstrate an ability to reflect philosophically, theologically, and spiritually on their experience accompanying communities living on the margins of Filipino society, and through this reflection to deepen their understanding of how they might find meaning in life and respond to the call to work for social justice and the common good.

- Understand and discuss coherently central philosophical and theological issues, such as the problem of evil, the existence of God, theories of social justice, and the nature of the self and its relationship to community.

- Demonstrate an ability to identify, analyze, and critique the main arguments found in the writings of philosophers and theologians such as Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, H. Richard Niebuhr, Jerome Miller, and Karl Rahner.

- Understand and reflect upon the diversity of faith that is found in US and Filipino cultures, and appreciate how these varied spiritual and religious approaches can influence the ways one responds to suffering and injustice.

- Demonstrate an ability to apply philosophical and theological theories to their experience accompanying Filipinos living in poverty, and use this analysis to deepen their appreciation of how scholarly reflection and community engagement mutually support one another.

**Academic Integrity**

In keeping with USF’s Academic Honor code, students are expected to “demonstrate the core values of the University of San Francisco by upholding the standards of honesty and integrity, excellence in their academic work, and respect for others in their educational experiences.” Academic dishonesty in any form with not be tolerated and will be dealt with according to USF’s Academic Honor Code. A complete discussion of the Honor Code may be found at [www.usfca.edu/catalog/policies/honor/](http://www.usfca.edu/catalog/policies/honor/)