

IS 151 Theological Interpretation: God, Community and Transformation
Fall, 2010 Thursdays, 8:15 – 11:30

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Office Hours posted on office door

Faculty responsible for this course:
Marilyn Salmon, Chris Smith, Richard Weis

Course Description: This course serves as an introduction to the approach to theological thinking and learning that is fundamental to the ethos and pedagogy of UTS. United uses a theological model of education that attends seriously to the pluralistic contexts in which theology is done, to the person doing the theology, to the resources of the students' traditions, and to their/our deepest theological values (i.e., love, hope, justice, liberation). Focus on one theme throughout the course is intended to provide a sharpened and integrated learning experience for the student's beginning year.

Theme for this year: Vocation

Course Outcomes: Although the course's theme might suggest that its purpose is to teach about the topic of vocation, the purpose of the course is to teach a framework for theological reflection and skills in analysis, research, and theological work that will support the organization of your subsequent seminary studies into an integrated whole. At the end of the course these are the things you should know and be able to do:

1. Given a particular topic or question, a student will articulate her or his own theological position on that topic using the approach for theological reflection in L. Green, *Let's Do Theology*. (Assessed on the basis of papers on your theology of vocation.)
2. A student will be able to articulate in a basic way how his or her personal story, relationships and situation in the world shape her or his theological perspective. (Assessed on the completion of the spiritual autobiography and meeting with the chaplain to discuss it.)
3. Given a specific topic, a student finds relevant and substantive published resources in a variety of formats, offers assessments of the resources that convey their value for the study of the topic, and cites their bibliographic data in a way that enables another to find the resources. (Assessed on the basis of the annotated bibliography.)
4. In theological conversation students will be able to engage those of differing viewpoints in a way that is respectful and at the same time engages the substance of differing viewpoints critically. (Assessed on the basis of class participation, including small group discussion, including the online component, and papers on theological reflection.)

Assumptions and Starting Points:

About the students:

1. You are self-motivated learners who will take responsibility for your own learning within the structures of the course.
2. You each have your own particular way of thinking theologically and living religiously. Thus the work you do in this course will always have a personal dimension. Even when you are not consciously reflecting on your own theological commitments, these will be engaged along with whatever is the conscious focus of your work.
3. You will need time and space to process and integrate what you learn in this course. The design of the course has created space for this, but you should assume that a certain amount of this integrative work is something you need to do on your own. Further, assume that this process of integration will continue beyond this course.
4. You are a highly diverse group. In gender, race/ethnicity, age, sexual identity, formative experiences, denominational commitments, theological convictions, skills, vocational clarity, etc., This is a great value for our work together. This also puts a premium on the work of listening to each other carefully and speaking respectfully.

About the subject:

1. Theology is human talk about God; it is not God. It partakes of human frailty and limitation even though it attempts to speak of One who transcends human frailty and limitation. All theological statements are in some sense provisional and subject to critique and revision.
2. Theology is a process of interpreting, making sense of the world in relation to God.
3. Theological conversation among diverse voices is a valuable way to be engaged in the process of interpreting theological statements and assessing human limitations.
4. Attentiveness to the explicit process of theological reflection is more important for good theology than knowledge of specific doctrinal material, although this is not without its own importance.

Contacting the Instructor: If you have questions or concerns related to the course that you want to discuss, contact me to schedule an appointment. I have office hours posted on my office door where you can sign up for a time. Usually I will have office hours on Thursdays following chapel. You can also reach me by e-mail. This is the most reliable way to contact me as I do check messages each day.

Seminary Policy on Extensions: The work for a course is terminated at the end of the final class session. The performance in the course is evaluated on the basis of the work

submitted by that time, unless an exception is made by the instructor, in which case a formal petition for extension must be approved by the instructor by the end of the final class session. Extensions (of course work) beyond the end of the semester will be approved only under extraordinary circumstances. Each instructor will include this policy on each course syllabus as well as the criteria by which she or he will grant such an extraordinary exception.

For this course, extraordinary circumstances include: death in the family, hospitalization for illness or injury, or serious illness of self or family member. If you think you have an extraordinary circumstance that affects your ability to complete the course, please talk with me about it.

Policy on Plagiarism: See Student Handbook. If I see evidence of plagiarism in written work, one of the following will occur: I will note it and suggest you be more careful in the future; I will request that you resubmit the paper with proper acknowledgement of sources; I will give a failing grade for the paper; I will give a failing grade for the course.

Policy on Inclusive Language: Exclusive language is any form of communication which demeans, discounts, or ignores the experiences and full humanity of a group of people on the basis of gender, race, ethnic groups class, age, sexual orientation, or differing abilities and hence fosters oppression and injustice. Language shapes relationship between persons and shapes the self-image of persons. UTS seeks to affirm the human community in all its diversity. In a tradition of seeking justice as an educational community, UTS strongly encourages all of its members to use language in writing and speech that is inclusive. See Student Handbook.

Policy on Cell Phones: Please turn cell phones off during class.

Class Sessions: Class will begin at 8:15 with a brief (10-15 minutes) service of worship, led by student teams. Class meetings will usually include a presentation, small group discussion, discussion with the whole class, and a preview of the next week's assignments. Several guests (faculty and staff and others) will give presentations during the semester. The course includes participation in on-line discussions (Moodle) with small groups. I will assign students to small groups and these will remain the same throughout the course.

Evaluations (Grades): The course is graded on a pass-no credit basis. Evaluations will be based on the following:

1. Attendance at each class session, from 8:15-11:30. (If you must miss a class, let me know before the class meeting. Missing more than two classes will jeopardize your ability to pass the course.)
2. Completion of the assignments on the date due, including assigned readings, papers and projects.
3. Participation in small groups, in class and on-line.
4. Participation in an opening worship team.
5. Demonstration of having fulfilled course outcomes.

Required Texts:

- Cooper, Burton Z. and John S. McClure. *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.
- Fretheim, Terence E. *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984
- Green, Laurie. *Let's Do Theology: A Pastoral Cycle Resource Book*. Revised Edition New York: Continuum, 2009.
- Placher, William C., Editor. *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005.
- Stone, Howard W. and James O. Duke. *How to Think Theologically*. Second edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006
- Thistlethwaite, Susan Brooks and Mary Potter Engel. *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*. Revised and expanded edition. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998.
- Study Bible, NRSV translation; HarperCollins or Oxford Annotated, current edition

Required Readings on Reserve: Several readings, noted in the schedule of assignments, are available on reserve in the library.

Required Readings accessible through FirstSearch: Several articles, noted in the schedule of assignments, are available online through FirstSearch. You will find complete and easy-to-follow directions for using FirstSearch in the library, in a pamphlet near the computers, and in the human form of our very helpful and knowledgeable library staff.

Class Schedule:

9/16 Introduction to the Course

The Syllabus

The Spiritual Autobiography: presentation by Martha Postlethwaite

Moodle: presentation by Adam Pfuhl

Meeting of small groups

Preview of the next week's assignments

9/23 Vocation and Spiritual Journey

Read: Spiritual Chronicle, chapters 1-3

Lowry, in *Leading Lives That Matter*, ch 7 & 8 (on reserve)

Harding, "I Hear Them...Calling," in *Leading Lives...*(on reserve)

Schweitzer, "I Resolve to Become a Jungle Doctor" in *Leading Lives...*

May, "One Woman's Wrestling With Vocation," FirstSearch/on reserve

Write: your Spiritual Autobiography, as defined in chapter 2 of the Spiritual Chronicle. Prepare to discuss with your small group the parts of your autobiography you would like to share with other members of your group. This assignment will not be graded, but only noted that it has been completed.

9/30 The Nature of Theological Reflection
guest presentation: Richard Weis

Read: Stone & Duke, *How to Think Theologically*

Cooper & McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, pp. 1-35

Prepare: Fill out your theological profile chart (handed out in class 9/23) and reflect on how this suggests you would work with the resources, processes, etc., in theological reflection described by Stone & Duke. Be prepared to discuss this with your small group in class.

10/7 A Method for Doing Theology

Read: Green, *Let's Do Theology*

Moodle discussion: By Monday, 10/11 post a description of an experience (briefly) that informs your own theological thinking. By Wednesday, 10/13, respond to the postings of other members (briefly).

Prepare: Choose a bible story or a biblical person (or a family story or person) that informs how you think about God, about your relationships, your vocation. Prepare to discuss with your small group members.

10/14 Who Is the God who calls you? A biblical perspective

Read: Selected texts from the Christian Bible (TBA on 10/7)

Moodle: By Monday, 10/18, post a short description of the character of God based on your reading and interpretation of the assigned biblical texts. By Wednesday, 10/20, read the postings of other members of your group so that you are prepared to engage in conversation in your small group discussions.

Write: What is the character of God? Or, who is God, according to the Christian scriptures? How does God act? Or not? What adjectives describe God? Or verbs? Or adverbs? Refer to the biblical texts from which you derive your description of God by chapter and verse in parentheses, i.e., God is love (John 13:34).

10/21 The Arts As a Model for Theological Reflection

Guest Presentation: Cindi Beth Johnson

Read: Yates, *Arts in Theological Education: New Possibilities for Integration*.

Atlanta: Scholars Press. 1987. pp. 97-125. On reserve

Dillenberger, *Style and Content in Christian Art*. New York: Abingdon, 1965. pp 11-28. on reserve

Habel, *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001. pp 51-64; 84-97. on reserve

Moodle: Post your responses to, or engagement with the readings for this week by Tuesday, 10/19. Read the postings of group members before class.

Prepare for discussion: Readings and your posted responses related to the assigned readings. Other discussion questions will be provided by our guest presenter.

Reading Week. Classes do not meet this week.

11/4 Theological Conversation Embracing Difference

Read: Thistlethwaite & Engel, *Lift Every Voice*, pp 1-95, and one chapter of your choice

Moodle: By Monday 11/1 post your reflections on one or two of the chapters in *Lift Every Voice*, indicating why it was particularly significant to you. Read the postings before class.

Prepare to Discuss: What difference does difference make in doing theology?

Project on theology and the arts due: Reflect on Psalm 65 and Psalm 104 and allow your reflections to take the form of an artistic or liturgical expression. You may use any medium you choose for an artistic expression of your theological reflection. Liturgical expressions might take the form of a written prayer, hymn, act of praise, etc. This assignment will not be graded, but only noted that it has been completed.

11/11 Research for Doing Theology

Guest Presentation: Sue Ebbers and Dale Dobias

Read: Cooper & McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, pp 37-69
Turabian, *Manual for Writers of Term Papers..7th edition* pp 133-139, i.e., the section titled "General Introduction to Citation Practices"

Note: Separate Handout on the Annotated Bibliography Assignment, due 12/2

Prepare to Discuss: Fill out your theological profile chart (handed out in class on 11/2 and come prepared to discuss this with your small group.

11/18 A Human Vocation?

Guest Presentation: Rabbi Amy Eilberg

Read: Placher, *Callings:* pp 47-51, 232-239, 254-261, 300-303, 322-324, 385-389

Bass and Schwehn, "Measure of Success" FirstSearch and on reserve
Casaldaliga and Vigil, "Everyday Faithfulness" on reserve

11/25 Thanksgiving Day Classes do not meet!

12/ 2 Vocation to Office in the Church

Read: Placher, *Callings*: pp 150-154, 154-175, 211-213, 220-227, 429-443
Lischer, “The Called Life: An Essay on the Pastoral Vocation” FS/reserve
Copenhaver, “Portrait of a Pastor: Mysteries and Blessings” FS/reserve
Holland, “The Public Vocation of the Pastor” FS/reserve

Prepare to Discuss: How does one discern a vocation to office in the church? What are the particular gifts of this vocation? How does one discern (or discover, or name) the gifts of any vocation? What do the readings for the day suggest to you about vocation?

Assignment Due: Your annotated bibliography is due today.

12/9 The God Who Suffers

Read: Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 1,3,5,6,7,8,9,10; the poem by Karen Drescher following the dedication page

Prepare to Discuss: What difference does it make for our theological reflection that God suffers? What difference does it make for our theology of vocation that God suffers with and for us? If this is the God who calls us, what does this imply about vocation?

12/16 Theology of Vocation: Endings and Beginnings

Concluding conversations; course evaluations

Assignment Due: a statement of your theological understanding of vocation, following the approach to theological work offered in Green and drawing on the resources of the course. In your theological work, draw on your own experience in one or more of the areas of vocation explored over the semester. Think in terms of about 1000 words, or four double-spaced pages.