

Contemporary Issues in Christian Theology
Professor: Whitney Bauman
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T/TH 11:00-12:15
GC 287 B

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Office Hours: Tuesday 4-6pm; Thursday 4-6pm; And by Appointment

Course Description

Many peoples today argue that “God is Dead” and/or theology is only of historical importance at this point in history. That is, people often wonder whether or not theology really *matters*. Others, however argue that God and “words about God” are merely a private matter of faith that should not be talked about in the public sphere. Still others, often called fundamentalists, argue that a very particular understanding of God should guide economics, politics, and cultural norms. This course will introduce students to some of the most current thinking in Christian Theology. We will engage such general questions as: What is Theology? Who is a theologian? What relevance does Theology have today? How has Theology shaped contemporary society and some of the major environmental and social issues of our planet today? In other words, far from being irrelevant, this course reveals the ways in which theology, literally *matters* the world around us. That is, theology is still alive and well and is embodied in institutions such as law and economics, and in understandings of nature, gender, sexuality, etc., for better and for worse! If this assumption is true, which this course hopes to argue successfully, then theology affects us all in one way or another and rather than ignore it, we ought to learn how to engage it. Through engaging the influence of theologies on contemporary societies today, we might learn how to take responsibility (that is learn to be able to respond) for the deconstructions and reconstructions of these theological influences.

Course Justification

The public understanding of religion and moreso theology is at best lacking. Theology has been pushed to the margins of our educational and public lives, yet continues to shape our lives in radical ways. This course looks at Christian theology as ideas and discourse about the evolution of meaning that Christians have developed over the past two millennia. As such, these meaning-making efforts take shape in the world around us still today. Through engaging these meaning-making efforts, we can learn how better to recognize their influence and take responsibility for reinforcing and/or helping to change them.

Aim of the Course

To provide students with tools to critically assess the role of Christian Theology in the world today.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, the student will a) be familiar with theological vocabulary; b) understand better the role that theology plays in contemporary society and culture; and c) have the tools necessary to critically engage theological understandings of the world.

Requirements/Grading:

Recognizing that there are many different learning styles, these requirements are designed to provide you with a variety of ways in which you can demonstrate your engagement with the materials in the course.

Participation (20%) (100pp)

The first step to doing well in this class is to show up! You can't be a part of the learning community if you are not present. If you have to be absent from the course, please notify me ahead of time. Any more than two absences (unless there are extenuating circumstances) will result in a lowering of your participation grade. One absence is a free-bee. The second you may use the "get out of class" free card that I am providing on the first day of class.

The second step to doing well in this course is to read the materials. I trust that you will read the materials for each week's class. But just for fun, there may be a few, in class, pop-quizzes throughout the semester if the instructor feels that people are not reading.

The third step to doing well in the class is to speak up during course discussions. I realize that we all exist on a spectrum between introversion and extroversion, but remember that the classroom is as good as all of the voices therein. We all lose if we don't hear your voice at some point(s) throughout the semester.

The classroom is a community of learners. That is, we are all in the process of critically engaging the lectures and course materials together. Learning should be a collaborative process and it will take all of us to learn this semester. Having said that there are some ground rules that should be followed in course discussions and assignments.

1. Confidentiality: Sometimes we are exploring serious issues in the course that may be hard to speak about or give voice too. I expect that students will respect one another's privacy in this course and allow room for this type of exploration.
2. Trust and Respect: The classroom is a learning community and it is only as good as the relationships of the people that make up the classroom. Give your class-mates the benefit of the doubt before jumping to conclusions about what is said. Also, be sure to state your opinions, questions, ideas and beliefs in a way that is not intentionally disrespectful to others in the class.
3. Academic Honesty. In all written materials, students will be expected to cite sources. Plagiarizing and "Copying" from other students will result in a lower grade. Grading for written assignments will follow the Rubric that is handed out on the first day and posted on Blackboard.
4. Other "Ground Rules" will be discussed in the first day of class.

Class Presentation (20%) (100pp). All Students are required to pick one Thursday in class to present on the course readings for the topic of that week. These presentations can use video, art, music, discussion, case studies, etc. in order to present the ideas and/or information in a given week's reading. Students may have to work in groups some weeks, but in no more than groups of 3.

These presentations are intended to get the course reading discussion going. Thus, they do not have to be an hour long, but rather are intended to initiate us into the discussion of the course readings.

Mid-term Essay (30%) (100pp)

All Students will take a mid-term essay exam which will cover course lectures, readings, and discussions through October 8th. The Exam will be distributed at the end of class on **October 13th** and must be turned in by **October 20th**.

Final Essay (30%) (100pp). Students will write a final essay of 6-10 pages based on the content of the course. The goal of the paper is to apply some of the critical theories and methods learned in the course to specific issues. Each student will sign up with the professor on **October 1**, for an office-hour time to discuss the final paper. Students should bring to that office hour discussion a **one-page** proposal outlining which of the following three questions will be addressed and an idea for how this will be done.

There are Three Ways you can Approach this Final Paper.

1. Take **each** section of the course and write 1/3 of the essay on that section in a way that brings the three together into a coherent thesis. The three questions would be (given the readings): What is Theology? What counts as “doing” theology? And how does this relate to _____ (Gender, an environmental issue, evolution, economics, etc.).
2. Take **one** of the authors in the course and write a paper on his/her approach to theology: What are the primary concerns addressed? Why does it matter? Do you agree with the approach? What are some problems to the approach. The point here would be to critically analyze one of the authors we have read during the course of the semester. (Whether in one of the handouts or the required texts.)
3. Pick **one** specific issue such as poverty, global climate change, the separation of church and state, sexism, the relationship between Christianity and another religious tradition, etc. In the paper, argue how the issue might be informed by theological analysis, including but not limited to: a) how theology might contribute to the problem and b) what a theologically informed solution to the issue might look like.

In each of the three examples, the essay should include course materials (lectures/readings/discussions), and at least one outside book source, one outside article, and one outside electronic resource. The essays should follow the Chicago style of citation (which will be posted on our blackboard site). Furthermore, the essays should have a clearly defined thesis/argument (What is the goal of this essay) that is then demonstrated/defended.

Grading Scale

A	96-100	C	72-77
A-	91-95	C-	71, 70
B+	89, 88	D+	69, 68
B	82-87	D	62-67
B-	80, 81	D-	60, 61
C+	79, 78	F	59 and below

Required Texts

Mark Hulsether, *Religion, Culture, and Politics in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Columbia University Press, 2007), ISBN 0231144032.

Graham Ward, *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory* (Palgrave, 2000, 2nd ed.). ISBN 0312227663.

Miguel A. De La Torre, ed. *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation* (Chalice Press, 2004). ISBN 0827214480.

Helpful Texts

Important Dates

Schedule:

Part I: Introductions, What is Theology? Historical and Contemporary Understandings

Week 1: Introductions: What is Theology?

August 25: Syllabus, Ground Rules, Introductions, “what is theology?”
In class, one page essay: “What is Theology?”

August 27: What is Theology? Some Historical Notes
Select Course Discussion Dates

Readings:

Week 2: Introductions: What is Theology?

September 1:

Readings:

September 3: Visit to Library for Course Research Tutorial

Week 3: Introductions: What is Theology?

September 8:

Readings:

September 10:

Readings:

Part II: Methods in Theology: Contemporary Issues

Week 4: Methods in Theology: Sources

September 15:

Readings:

September 17:

Readings:

Week 5: Methods in Theology: How do we know?/Epistemology

September 22:

Readings:

September 24:

Readings:

Week 6: Methods in Theology: Liberation

September 29:

Readings:

October 1:

Sign up to meet with Whitney about your final paper.

Readings:

Week 7: Methods in Theology: Post-Colonial

October 6:

Readings:

October 8:

Readings:

Part III: Mattering Theologies:

How theologies shape our lives and the world(s) around us.

Issues of Creation

Week 8: Theology and Nature

October 13:

Pass Out Essay Exams

Readings:

October 15: (Take Home Essay Exam, no class.)

Week 9: Theology and Science

October 20:

*Turn in Essay Exam.
Mid-Term Evaluation*

October 22:

Readings:

Issues of Anthropology (Imago Dei)

Week 10: Theology and Gender

October 27:

Readings:

October 29:

Readings:

Week 11: Theology and Race (AAR Week)

November 3:

Readings:

November 5:

Readings:

Week 12: Theology and Sexuality

November 10:

Readings:

November 12:

Readings:

Issues of Justice (Sin/Hermatology and Salvation/Soteriology)

Week 13: Theology and Politics

November 17:

Readings:

November 19:

Readings:

Week 14: Theology and Economics

November 24:

Readings:

November 26: No Class. Thanksgiving! Work on Final Essay or Relax!

Week 15: Theology and Economics (Cont) / Review

December 1:

Readings:

December 3: Wrap up

Final Essay Due