

The Life and Thought of John Wesley  
CF 204  
Professor Pamela Couture  
course description and syllabus

Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School  
Fall, 2002  
Tuesdays, 2:15-5:00  
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Narrative

This course introduces students to the theology, ethics, and spirituality of John Wesley, the founder of modern Methodism. The course explores the social conditions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in which Methodism took root, the theological influences that inspired the faith of the Wesleys, and the practices that developed as they sought to live out their faith. Underlying this study is the question of faith: how is this tradition not only a curiosity of the 18<sup>th</sup> century but also a living tradition that inspires faithful practice today? To explore this question students will study the theology and practice of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Wesleys and explore the meaning of Wesleyan theology and practice today.

Epistemological questions, questions of how we know God and humanity, are central to Wesleyan theology and practice. Intellectual knowledge has always been important in the Wesleyan tradition, and formal theological “knowing” develops from the “quadrilateral” in the interplay of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. Practical knowledge, however, has been equally important in the Wesleyan tradition. Articulation of theological ideas is not enough in the Wesleyan tradition; ideas must be lived, tested, experienced, and affirmed as consistent with the “analogy of faith,” or “the way of salvation,” the general framework of faith. Much recent conversation among scholars and practitioners in Wesleyan studies has focused on knowing God through “the means of grace,” works of mercy and works of piety. The practice of the means of grace and the articulation of intellectual theological ideas interact with one another in the development of a living Wesleyan theology. Therefore, the practice of the means of grace will provide a framework in which our study of intellectual theological ideas occurs. Short devotions using the United Methodist Book of Worship will begin and end the class. Class will break for chapel, and students are expected to attend. Three occasions to contemplate the “work of mercy” in the Wesleyan tradition will be scheduled; devotions in class after those occasions will reflect the prayer concerns that emerge from our contemplation of Wesleyan works of mercy.

Assignments:

1) Students will be assigned responsibilities for opening devotions on a rotating basis. Opening devotions should use the United Methodist Book of Worship or the United Methodist Hymnal

and should reflect on the theme of the previous week's work. I will conduct closing devotions.

2) Students should read all sermons assigned and will report on two sermons. The report should answer the following questions: What is the primary metaphor that animates the sermon? Does the sermon preach today?

3) The final project will be of the student's choosing. Students must decide by mid semester which project they will choose. Students may:

a) write and preach three contemporary sermons based around the traditional metaphors of Wesley's sermons. Dates and times of the sermons need to be given to the professor and the class in advance. The text and tape of the sermons should be handed in. A ten minute version of the sermon will be preached in the final class period.

b) develop lessons plans and teach three adult education sessions on Wesleyan theology. Dates and times of the classes need to be given to the professor and the class in advance. The professor will try to attend one class. The lesson plans and a tape of the class should be handed in. A ten minute version of the class will be taught in the final class period.

c) write a traditional, twenty-five page paper. The paper should begin with a case study of one of the contemporary "works of mercy" studied in class, and think from the case study to the major themes of the Wesleyan faith: grace, sin, and the way of salvation. Class texts should be properly cited. A 10 minute version of the paper will be presented in the final class session.

Grading: 1/3 class participation, including sermon presentation; 2/3 final project.

Relevant Internet sites:

Wesley's Sermons can be found at: <http://gbgm-umc.org/UMhistory/Wesley/sermons/>

A Bibliography can be found at <http://www.wesleyanstudies.edu>

The Social Creed and Social Principles can be found at <http://www.umc-gbcs.org/princ.htm>

Required Books include:

Theodore Runyon. *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*. Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1998.

Randy Maddox. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Nashville, Kingswood Books, 1994.

Richard P. Heitzenrater. *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.

Manfred Marquardt. *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992. (Out of print.)

*The United Methodist Book of Worship*. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992.

John Wesley's Sermons may be purchased or accessed on the Internet.

## Class schedule

- Sept. 10 A: Introductions, The Social Conditions of 18<sup>th</sup> Century England  
B: Introduction to Wesleyan Theology : The Uses of Wesleyan Theology today: The Use of Wesley Theology in the report of the Connectional Process Team, the foundation documents of the Bishops Initiative on Children and Poverty, and In Search of Unity, the document of the dialogue on theological diversity
- Sept. 17 Overview: God, Humanity, and Grace and Original Sin  
Runyon, 7-101  
Sermon: Wesley's "Preface" to the Sermons, "The Image of God"  
Paul Womack, teaching
- Sept. 24 Overview: Community, Means of Grace, Sacraments  
Runyon, 102-167  
Sermon: "The Means of Grace"
- Sept. 27 Wesleyan Studies Teach In, Mary Elizabeth Moore presenting. This event is required, and attendance will be taken. Please plan to be present for the whole day.
- Oct. 1 Excursis: the Internationalization of the Social Principles: What are the issues?  
Reading: the Social Principles from the Book of Discipline  
You can access the Social Principles on the web at <http://www.umc-gbcs.org/princ.htm>  
Begin reading Heizenrater assignment: it is long
- Oct. 8 Social Conditions and the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Wesleyan Movement  
Heitzenraiter, 33-229. Read quickly for the overall flow of the story. In succeeding sessions, reread pages in Heitzenrater that provides historical background to sermons and tracts. This practice will help to reinforce the historical story.
- Oct. 22 God, Humanity, Grace and Original Sin Reconsidered  
Students must declare their choice of final project.  
Maddox, 1-92  
Sermons: "The Circumcision of the Heart," "The One Thing Needful," "The Almost Christian" (Reread RPH: 47-48, 76, 136, 177, 302)
- Oct. 15 reading week, no class
- Oct. 28-29 trip to the General Board of Global Ministries/ Women's Division, to study the way the work of a National Board interprets Wesleyan theology. This trip is not required but is an opportunity to view the church in action, and to better understand the resources of the General Church. It will be open to all Methodist students and others, once the places are filled by class members.
- Nov. 5 Wesley's Christology and Pneumatology

Maddox, 94-139

Sermons: "The Witness of the Spirit II," "The Repentance of Believers" (Reread RPH: 228)

Nov. 12 The Work of Mercy Now

Poverty in CIEMAL conferences

Marquardt, 19-86

Sermon: "Sermon on the Mount" (reread RPH 77,177-178, 185)

Nov. 19 What is Salvation?

Maddox, 141-190

Sermon: "Free Grace," "The Scripture Way of Salvation" (Reread RPH: 101, 120, 220)

Nov. 26 The Work of Mercy Now

Tentatively: Prison Ministries

Marquardt, 103-138

Tracts: "Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions," "Thoughts Upon Liberty,"  
"Thoughts on Slavery"

Dec. 3 The Means of Grace and Response

Maddox, 192-254

Sermons: "The Catholic Spirit," "Christian Perfection" (Reread RPH: 121, 173, 178)

Dec. 10 The Work of Mercy Now

Couture, Chapter 3, Seeing Children, Seeing God

Sermons: "On Zeal," "On Caring for the Sick"

Dec. 17: No class (compensation for Wesleyan Studies Teach In)