



BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
STH TT-825 SPRING 2011

JOHN WESLEY'S THEOLOGY TODAY

INSTRUCTORS:

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The theology of John Wesley, though projected from an historical past, is a living and dynamic force in contemporary theology. The Wesleyan tradition is at its best when it remains responsive to its past and open to its future. This course will examine the primary doctrinal, methodological, and practical commitments of John Wesley's theology as developed in his sermons, hymns, writings, and life-praxis. The course will also explore

contemporary trends in Methodism and in Wesleyan theology more generally as they attempt to respond to the present theological situation and to the future prospects of a Christian faith lived out in the twenty-first century.

REQUIRED READING

The following books are required reading for this course. Short quizzes over the reading material will be given during the first 15 minutes of each class.

Primary Textbooks

- Jennings, Theodore W. *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1990.
- Maddox, Randy. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Nashville: Kingswood, 1994.
- Maddox, Randy, ed., *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998.
- Outler, Albert & Richard Heitzenrater, Eds. *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1991.

Articles available on the Blackboard website (blackboard.bu.edu)

- Miles, Rebekah. "Happiness, Holiness, and the Moral Life." In Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, 207-224.
- Mullino Moore, Mary Elizabeth. "New Creation: Repentance, Reparation, and Reconciliation." In M.

Douglas Meeks, ed. *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation*, 93-117. Available on Blackboard website.

- Park, Jong Chun. "Christian Perfection and Confucian Sage Learning: An Interreligious Dialogue in the Crisis of Life." In M. Douglas Meeks, ed. *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation*, 119-48. Available on Blackboard website.
- Stone, Bryan. "Wesleyan Theology, Scriptural Authority, and Homosexuality." In *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Fall, 1995), 108-138. Available on Blackboard website.
- Westerfield Tucker, Karen. "Wesley's Emphasis on Worship and the Means of Grace." In Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, 225-41. Available on Blackboard website.

READING RESPONSE PAPERS

Each student will be required to introduce the assigned reading material on two given afternoons with a prepared response paper. This paper should be divided into two roughly equal parts and should (1) *briefly summarize* the content of the readings, highlighting the primary themes and arguments followed by (2) a *critical analysis and evaluation* of the readings. Failure to maintain an adequate balance between these two sections will result in a serious grade reduction on the paper, possibly even a failing grade. The paper should be 6-8 pages in length, typed, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, using a standard 12-pt. font, and enough photocopies made for the professor and each student to have their own personal copy.

At the beginning of the class, the student will read the paper. The class will then be allowed to ask "questions of clarification" and "questions of content" followed by a discussion of the paper and the reading material.

TERM PROJECT

Each student is asked to write a 15-20 page research paper (20-25 pages for doctoral students) on some aspect of John Wesley's theology. The paper should be typed, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, and with proper citations and bibliography. See sample topics attached.

FINAL EXAM

The Final Examination in this course will be a comprehensive oral examination and will test for a mastery of John Wesley's theology, and for the ability to constructively relate that theology to the challenges and opportunities of contemporary culture. Further instructions will be given in class in preparation for the exam.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

The instructor will conscientiously attempt and all students are urged to use inclusive language, images, and metaphors in both their speaking and writing.

CLASS ATTENDANCE

If, in the professor's opinion, the student is missing too many class sessions, this can affect the student's final grade—sometimes seriously. Class discussion is a key to meeting the course objectives. Please consult with the professor ahead of time if you believe you will have difficulties in this area.

LATE POLICY

No reading response papers or term projects will be accepted late at all and no quizzes may be taken other than on the afternoon they are scheduled.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any students in this course who have a disability that might prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should meet with the instructor as soon as possible to initiate disability verification and discuss accommodations that may be necessary to ensure your full participation in the successful completion of course requirements.

DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Students taking the course for doctoral credit are required to do all work at a doctoral level. In addition, students should submit one review of a recent book related to the course content for publication in an appropriate journal. The length should be between 500-1000 words. Due Date: April 25.

STH ACADEMIC CODE OF CONDUCT

The STH Academic Code of Conduct may be found on the STH website at: www.bu.edu/sth/academic/academic-conduct. All students are required to familiarize themselves with this code, its definitions of misconduct, and its sanctions. Students should especially familiarize themselves with the section on plagiarism.

FINAL GRADE CALCULATION

Reading Response Papers	20%
Term Project	30%
Reading Quizzes	30%
Final Examination	20%

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Reading Schedule	Total Pages
Monday, January 24	Course Introduction—Wesley's Theological Biography	
Monday, January 31	Maddox, 13-47 Stone, 108-138 (blackboard) Sermons: "A Caution Against Bigotry" (287-298), "Catholic Spirit" (299-	89

	309)	
Monday, February 7 God	Maddox, 48-64; RWT, Ch. 4 (65-82), Ch 11 (169-182) Sermons: “Free Grace” (49-60), “God’s Love to Fallen Man” (475-484), “The Unity of the Divine Being” (531-540)	91
Monday, February 14 Theological Anthropology	Maddox, 65-93 Sermons: “The Image of God” (13-22), “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption” (133-144), “Original Sin” (325-334), “On Working Out Our Own Salvation” (485-492)	69
Tuesday, February 22 Note Tuesday Schedule! Christ; Faith & Works	Maddox, 94-140 “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount V” (207-222), “The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law” (255-266), “The Law Established Through Faith, I” (267-276), “The Law Established Through Faith, II” (277-286), “The Lord Our Righteousness” (381-392)	107
Monday, February 28 The Way of Salvation	Maddox, 141-191 “The One Thing Needful” (33-38), “Salvation by Faith” (39-48), “The Almost Christian” (61-68), “Justification by Faith” (111-122), “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (371-380), “The Repentance of Believers” (405-417)	110
Monday, March 7 Christian Perfection	RWT, Ch. 3 (49-64) Park, 119-148 (blackboard) “The Circumcision of the Heart” (23-32), “Christian Perfection” (69- 84), “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God” (183-192), “On Sin in Believers” (359-370)	78
Spring Break		
Monday, March 21 The Holy Spirit	RWT, Ch. 12-13 (183-212) Miles, 207-24 (blackboard) “The Witness of the Spirit, I” (145-155), “The Witness of the Spirit, II” (393-403)	70
Monday, March 28 Means of Grace	Maddox, 192-229 “The Means of Grace” (157-172), “The Marks of the New Birth” (173- 182), “The New Birth” (335-346), “On Zeal” (465-474), “The Duty of Constant Communion” (501-510)	96
Monday, April 4 Holy Living	Jennings, 9-96 “The Use of Money” (347-357), “The Good Steward” (419-430), “The Danger of Riches” (451-464)	125
Monday, April 11 Holy Living	Jennings, 97-222 “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, VIII” (239-254)	142

Thursday, April 21 Note Thursday Schedule!	Papers are due No Reading	
Monday, April 25 Ecclesiology	RWT, Ch. 8-9 (129-160), Ch. 14 (213-226) Westerfield Tucker, 225-41 (blackboard) “Of the Church” (45-57, blackboard); “Prophets and Priests” (541-548),	84
Monday, May 2 Eschatology	Maddox, 230-256 Mullino Moore, 93-117 (blackboard) “The Great Assize” (311-324), “The New Creation” (493-500), “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity” (549-557); “The General Deliverance” (436-450, blackboard)	96
TBA	Final Exam	

John Wesley's Theology Today

The following are some suggested topics for Research Papers borrowed and adapted from Rob L. Staples. These topics are suggestions offered to stimulate your interest. Other topics may be proposed by the student in consultation with the instructor.)

1. THE GOD-WORLD RELATIONSHIP IN WESLEY

Problem: Modern theology seems to fluctuate between an emphasis on immanence (Schleiermacher & Ritschl) to an emphasis on transcendence (Barth & Brunner) and back to immanence again (Process Theology, Christian Atheism). Where does Wesley fit? How involved in the world is God? How independent of the world is God for Wesley?

2. THE WESLEYAN QUADRILATERAL

Problem: What is the relation between Reason, Experience, Tradition, and Scripture, in Wesley's concept of religious authority? How should Wesleyans today interact with, appropriate, and be critical of Wesley's own handling of these authorities?

3. WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

Problem: How does Wesley's doctrine of justification compare with Luther's sola fide, etc.? Or is there any difference between Wesley's and the Reformation doctrines?

4. WESLEY'S CONCEPT OF WORSHIP

Problem: How do we reconcile Wesley's emphasis on order and liturgy on the one hand with his emphasis on spontaneity and freedom on the other hand, and what implications are there in his views for a present-day understanding of worship in Wesleyan churches?

5. WESLEY'S PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Problem: What are Wesley's principles of hermeneutics? His methods of exegesis? His use of scripture in preaching? This problem is related to #2 above but is more focused on scripture.

6. WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM

Problem: Is there any incompatibility between Wesley's Anglican belief in infant baptism and his belief in conversion as a personal experience? How important was baptism in Wesley's thought?

7. WESLEY'S CONCEPT OF EUCHARIST

Problem: How should we classify Wesley's eucharistic doctrine? Where does he fit on the spectrum between transubstantiation (Catholic) on the one hand and a "memorial" view on the other? Because of Wesley's pietism and emphasis on inward religious experience would he not have been more consistent if he had dispensed with the Lord's Supper as did the Quakers?

8. WESLEY'S CONCEPT OF THE SACRAMENTS

Problem: This would be similar to the above two problems, but much broader and encompassing Wesley's

views on sacraments in general. Do the sacraments function as means of grace for Wesley or are they symbolic? Or both?

9. WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

Problem: What exactly does Wesley mean by such terms as Christian Perfection and Sanctification? How did Wesley ground his doctrine of perfection in Scripture? What role did Christian experience play in the formulation of this doctrine?

10. WESLEY AND CALVINISM

Problem: What are the similarities and differences between Wesleyanism and Calvinism regarding the doctrines of sin and grace, etc.? Justification and Predestination will also be involved.

11. ORIGINAL SIN

Problem: How did Wesley understand "Original Sin" and what is its relationship to other types of sin that Wesley talked about? What is the status of original sin in the life of the sanctified believer?

12. WESLEY'S DEFINITION(S) OF SIN

Problem: Just how extensive and significant is his definition of sin as a "voluntary transgression of the known law"? In what ways did Wesley define sin in terms other than this? What is the place of "involuntary" acts? Of infirmities? What is meant by "voluntary"? etc. Can any moral action be involuntary?

13. WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF ASSURANCE (or the Witness of the Spirit)

Problem: Several variations on this theme could be attempted. E.g. how does Wesley's concept of assurance compare with Luther's or Calvin's? Also: What is the relation between assurance and perfection in Wesley? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in Wesley's doctrine of assurance?

14. A COMPARISON OF THE RELATIVE INFLUENCES OF PRACTICAL MYSTICISM AND MORAVIANISM IN SHAPING WESLEY'S THEOLOGY

Problem: What aspects of his thought were formed by his encounter with the practical mystics (Taylor, a Kempis, Law) and what aspects were influenced by the Moravians? What modifications did he make of each?

15. TOWARD A WESLEYAN SPIRITUALITY

Problem: What insights can Wesleyan theology offer toward the formation of a contemporary spirituality today? Especially important here might be Wesley's attitude toward spiritual disciplines, sacraments, means of grace, ordinances, worship, etc.

16. WESLEY AND CLASS MEETINGS

Problem: There is a resurgence of interest in Wesley's model of bands and class-meetings as well as other patterns for church renewal he utilized (lay preaching, etc.) Explore these historically and suggest applications for today's church.

17. WESLEY'S POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC VIEWS

Problem: What did Wesley believe about the social conditions of his time? What kinds of analysis did he engage in, if at all? What did Wesley teach especially about issues of wealth, property, and possessions?

18. THE TIME ELEMENT IN SANCTIFICATION

Problem: Wesley said sanctification was both "instantaneous" and "gradual." What is the relation between these two? Some present-day Wesleyan denominations (Nazarenes, for example) emphasize that one can become entirely sanctified in an instant? Is this Wesleyan? If so, why is this not emphasized in Methodist churches? If not, what are the roots of this change (distortion?) in Wesleyanism.

19. REPENTANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Problem: Do Christians need to "repent"? Cf. his sermon on "The Repentance of Believers." How does this relate to his view that the person who is born of God does not commit sin?

20. WESLEY'S CONCEPT OF PREVENIENT GRACE

Problem: What is the correct understanding of this facet of Wesley's thought? What is the relation between the divine and human factors in bringing a person to salvation? Was Wesley's view synergistic or monergistic? Is there any "continuity" between nature and grace in Wesley's thought which would differentiate him from Calvinism in which there is a radical discontinuity between the two?

21. WESLEYANISM AND PROCESS THEOLOGY

Problem: Why is it that many theologians in the Wesleyan tradition seem drawn to process thought (Cobb, Keller, Ogden, Oord, Moore, Stone)? Are there ways of interpreting Wesley's theology in process categories that are especially illuminating and helpful or is this a dangerous distortion of Wesley's thought that requires too much of a sacrifice of central Wesleyan convictions?

22. SANCTIFICATION AND LIBERATION

Problem: This was the theme of the 6th annual Oxford Institute on Methodist Theological Studies. How is the doctrine of sanctification a "liberation theology," both personally and socially? What, if anything, can Wesley and liberation theology contribute to each other?

23. WESLEYANISM AND ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Problem: Does Wesleyan theology have anything to say to the environmental crisis? What resources, if any, are to be found in Wesley's views of prevenient grace, theological anthropology, and holiness, etc. that can throw light on this current problem or move us in the direction of developing an environmental-friendly theology of creation?

24. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION AND CHRISTIAN PACIFISM

Problem: Although Wesley was not a pacifist, does the full implication of Christian Perfection demand such a stance in today's world? If so, why? If not, why?