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Religious Studies 3120
MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY
Spring 2009

How dare human beings talk about God? Isn't it terribly dangerous to do this? What makes it seem possible or necessary?

Perhaps it is safe to say that wherever there is a sustained attempt to live religiously, someone will be trying to articulate the vision that makes sense of it and the principles that best guide it. We call this sort of discourse "theology" when it systematically refers to God and means to be *about* God as a (presumptuous?) study *of* God.

Theology has been a mainstream intellectual occupation in Christianity more than in any other tradition. (Why?) As a result, leading Christian theologians typically have a lot to say about theological method and the history and horizon of this kind of thinking. (Is this a good thing? For our purposes, yes!)

Theology changes over time, sometimes quite dramatically, because people's understanding of what it means to talk about God is affected by historical and cultural developments. "Modern" theology is theology that tries to meet the challenges of the modern era, which are always at least partly defined or implied by the European Enlightenment. Recent theology has often defined itself as "postmodern," positing that some basic principles of the Enlightenment are no longer in force. It is debated whether our "postmodern" life still belongs to the modern era. (I think it does.) In any case, we will certainly ask: How is theology challenged, and how may it respond, *now*?

More broadly, the purpose of the course is to improve our understanding of theological thinking through the careful appraisal of significant texts and the reasoning out of our own judgments on matters of theological concern, with due attention to social, political, and cultural contexts. This exercise should strengthen our capacity for any kind of disciplined thinking, particularly that relating to analysis and negotiation of our valuational commitments.

Readings will be assigned in these books available from the bookstore, as well as in handouts:

Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion* (1st ed.)
Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2nd ed.)
Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith*
Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*
Sallie McFague, *Models of God*

Grading will be based on class participation and homework (20%), a Theological Notebook (30%), a 3,000-word research paper (30%), and a final exam (20%). Writing guidelines will

be furnished.

SCHEDULE

- 1-12 Introduction to class. What is “enlightenment” and what does it mean for theology?
- 1-14 Discussion of enlightenment, cont. Kant’s formulation.
- 1-16 Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason*.

The Question of Religion

- 1-19 NO CLASS: MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY.
- 1-21 Theology founded on “religion”: Schleiermacher’s *On Religion*, First Speech.
- 1-23 *On Religion*, Second Speech.
- 1-26 *On Religion*, Fourth Speech. Theological Notebook entry [TN] due.
- 1-28 *On Religion*, Fifth Speech.
- 1-30 Schleiermacher’s *The Christian Faith*.
- 2-2 Barth’s attack on theological anthropocentrism.
- 2-4 *The Epistle to the Romans*, on the Seventh Chapter.
- 2-6 *The Epistle to the Romans*, on the Seventh Chapter, cont.
- 2-9 *The Epistle to the Romans*, on the Eighth Chapter. TN due.

- 2-10 **Luke Timothy Johnson, “How the Bible is True”** 11:30 Recital Hall, followed by lunch response session 12:45-2:00 [required attendance]

- 2-11 *The Epistle to the Romans*, on the Twelfth Chapter—424-450 and 475-492.
- 2-13 The dialectical theology movement and the Nazi crisis.
- 2-16 Return to the concept of religion: Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, Chaps.1-2.
- 2-18 *Dynamics of Faith*, Chaps. 3-4.
- 2-20 *Dynamics of Faith*, Chaps. 5-6.
- 2-23 Tillich on Christianity among the world religions. TN due.
- 2-25 Rahner on “anonymous Christianity.”

The Question of Politics

- 2-27 Marx and Engels’ critique of religion.
- 3-2 Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel.
- 3-4 Reinhold Niebuhr’s Christian realism.

- 3-5 **Mike Hogue, “Critical Theological Pragmatism: A Theology for a Post-Secular Theological Age”** 11:30, Leggett [required attendance]

- 3-6 The rise of liberation theologies: Cone.
- 3-9 Liberation theology in the Latin American Catholic context: Gutierrez’s *Theology of Liberation*, Chaps. 1-5.
- 3-11 *A Theology of Liberation*, Chaps. 6-8.
- 3-13 *A Theology of Liberation*, Chaps. 9-11. TN due.

MARCH 16-20 SPRING BREAK

3-23 *A Theology of Liberation*, Chaps. 12-13, Conclusion.

3-25 The rise of feminist theology.

The Question of Nature

3-27 MacFague, *Models of God*, Chaps. 1-2

3-30 NO CLASS DUE TO COMPS.

4-1 *Models of God*, Chap. 3

4-3 *Models of God*, Chap. 4.

4-6 *Models of God*, Chaps. 5-6. TN due.

4-8 Process theology.

4-10 Process theology, cont.

Whither Theology?

4-13, 15, 17 Debates in contemporary “evangelical” and “orthodox” theology.

4-20, 22, 24 TBA

Final exam due Friday, May 1.

THE THEOLOGICAL NOTEBOOK—GUIDELINES

For your course notebook, a loose-leaf binder is recommended. This will make it easier to hand in and take back your entries, and also to keep handouts together.

On one occasion for each of our featured types of theology (noted in the syllabus), you will be asked to bring to class a new entry in your Theological Notebook—about 2 pp., if typed double-space (500-600 words)—in which you discuss how our most recent work (including class discussion, as appropriate, in addition to the latest reading) fits into your study of theology. In each entry you should briefly analyze something that makes sense in a more positive way (e.g., a theological argument that seems strong, or that helps explain something you’d wondered about) and something else that is hard to make sense of (e.g. a theological argument that seems *wrong*, or an idea that sticks out at an odd angle from your own assumptions—what’s up with that?).

The Theological Notebook is an important learning tool that will enable you to keep track of what we come up with in a cumulative way.

Individual Notebook entries and responses will be graded unsatisfactory (-), satisfactory (V), or very good (+) depending on the attentiveness and thoughtfulness they show. The Notebook as a whole will get a letter grade.

THE ARGUMENT REVIEW

At least once in the semester you will provide guidance to class discussion by preparing a 1-page handout for us in which you address such questions as these: What basically is going on in the assigned reading? What do you think is a particularly important passage? How does the reading seem to fit into our picture of the development of theology so far? How, if at all, does it speak to your own theological concerns?

GUIDELINES FOR THE TERM PAPER

For your 10-12 pp. term paper (typed, double-spaced), you will tackle an issue in modern or contemporary theology. This issue will have to do with religious teaching, e.g. what Christianity has to say in a modern or contemporary context about God, creation, divine providence, revelation, faith, human moral capacity, the ideal community, etc. The issue will have attracted the attention of leading Christian thinkers, and you will either feature *one* such thinker's position (e.g. Gutierrez on Christianity and politics) with some consideration of how other Christian positions differed from it, or *two or three* thinkers' positions (e.g. Christian realism vs. liberation theology on Christianity and politics), setting up a debate. You will choose key primary-source texts for the purpose of explaining and evaluating the theological positions. You will also touch base with current scholarship, discussing at least one other substantial discussion of your thinker(s) on your issue (e.g. a recent article analyzing MacFague in relation to other feminist theologians).

By Week 6 you will have consulted with me on your topic and on how to find appropriate resources.

Work hard; have fun. You will have an opportunity to rewrite the essay to improve it.

SOME COURSE RULES

1. ***Class attendance.*** Being in class, being engaged with the work of the class, and behaving courteously are all expected. One discourtesy to avoid is coming into class late. Better late than never, definitely; but lateness counts as half an absence—that is, the assignment of sharing in the class’s work that day will be counted as only half done. (The math of this: a course point is lost for every absence after the second.)
2. ***Late papers.*** Written assignments turned in late will lose a letter grade or equivalent. Homework may not be turned in more than one week after its due date. No work of any kind will be accepted after the last day of final examinations. Exceptions to this policy will only be granted to the victims of unforeseeable and uncontrollable circumstances.
3. ***As a general rule, no e-mail submissions.*** Unless the instructor allows it under specified circumstances, e-mail submissions of assigned writing are not accepted.
4. ***Incompletes.*** An “Incomplete” grade for the course will only be given to students who, due to unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances, find themselves unable to complete course requirements during the term and can reasonably be expected to complete them within a few weeks after the term’s end. The “Incomplete” must be requested and appropriately justified *before* the end of final examinations.
5. ***Disabilities.*** Students with documented disabilities should discuss their needs with the instructor at the beginning of the semester.

ACADEMIC HONOR CODE of MILLSAPS COLLEGE

Millsaps College is an academic community dedicated to the pursuit of scholarly inquiry and intellectual growth. The foundation of this community is a spirit of personal honesty and mutual trust. Through their Honor Code, the students of Millsaps College affirm their adherence to these basic ethical principles.

An Honor Code is not simply a set of rules and procedures governing students' academic conduct. It is an opportunity to put personal responsibility and integrity into action. When students agree to abide by an Honor Code, they liberate themselves to pursue their academic goals in an atmosphere of mutual confidence and respect.

The success of the Code depends on the support of each member of the community. Students and faculty alike commit themselves in their work to the principles of academic honesty. When they become aware of infractions, both students and faculty are obligated to report them to the Honor Council, which is responsible for enforcement.

The pledge signed by all students upon entering the College is as follows:

As a Millsaps College student, I hereby affirm that I understand the Honor Code and am aware of its implications and of my responsibility to the Code. In the interests of expanding the atmosphere of respect and trust in the College, I promise to uphold the Honor Code and I will not tolerate dishonest behavior in myself or in others.

Each examination, quiz, or other assignment that is to be graded will carry the written pledge: **“I hereby certify that I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment. (Signature)”** The abbreviation “Pledged” followed by the student’s signature has the same meaning and may be acceptable on assignments other than final examinations.

It is the responsibility of students and faculty to report offenses to the Honor Code Council in the form of a written report. This account must be signed, the accusation explained in as much detail as possible, and submitted to the Dean of the College.

The Honor Council, 2008-2009

Students:

David Butler, Chair

Joey Quillin, Vice-Chair

Brooke Furrh, Sergeant-at-Arms

Stephen Butler

Mark Herndon

Amanda Smith

Faculty:

Mr. Harvey Fiser, Senior Faculty Secretary

Dr. Rachel Heard

Ms. Ashleigh Powers