

THEO 500: INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY

Instructor: Dr. Brian Bantum
Office: Pfeiffer 331
E-mail: brian.bantum@garrett.edu
Office Hours: www.calendly.com/bantum

Location: Main 108 (January 13,17)
Schedule: In-class, January 13-17, 9am-1pm
Online (asynchronous), January 21-24

Course Description:

Christian theology is the purposeful reflection upon God and God's world. Our beliefs about who God is (or is not) are bound to the way we live and who we live among. Theology shapes us as we struggle to discern the meaning of our lives in relationship to God, to one another, and to creation itself. This course serves as a starting point in exploring the questions, approaches and themes of systematic and constructive theologies.

By *systematic* I mean there is an interrelationship between the beliefs and doctrines that shape Christian faith. Sometimes these doctrines are explicit and sometimes they are implicit. But our faith and lives as disciples are animated by how we describe who God is, what we believe creation to be, what are human beings, what has gone wrong in our world and what does God do to "save" or "heal" or "restore" or "judge." Depending on the phrase we associate with salvation we already see implicit assumptions about who God is and what's gone wrong. Systematic theology is the process of thinking about these interrelationships with respect to who we believe God to be, and who we believe our ourselves to be.

By *constructive* I mean that theology is not simply a process of describing what others have said, the systems that some traditions or denominations or believers have articulated over time. While there are many ways of describing constructive theology, my invocation of thee term implies that theology is a creative and co-creative process. Theology is a way of being and a way of describing that draws from the descriptions, problems, formulas, and performances of theology that precede, but also speaks from its moment. In this speaking, we draw from the artists, theories, sciences, and histories that help us to describe our moment more faithfully and then discern what it might mean to say that God is acting and present in our moment.

And by *theologies* I mean that descriptions of God working in this world are always multiple. Sometimes they intersect, sometimes they are in conversation, and sometimes they are in opposition. If we confess that our God is transcendent, that God is one who cannot be known or captured within our language or knowledge or experience, then we might begin to open ourselves to all of these descriptions as offering us an insight into who God is. And yet we are also confronted by a God who brings *a* people into being, who is called by *a* name, who has a particularity, a personhood. How do we begin to discern who God is in the midst of this transcendence and personhood?

Throughout this course we will examine theology through many of the central doctrines of Christian confession (God, creation, humanity, the fall, Christology, etc.), attending to various treatments (or lack of treatment) of these doctrines, and the historical development of early creeds and confessions.

In addition to comparing theological claims and descriptions we will also endeavor to construct or speak of God and God's world in light of these descriptions, asking how our theological work might contribute to drawing people into a deeper sense of God in their midst.

Learning Objectives

- Identify differences in theological starting points and methods.
- Examine differences and similarities in various theological systems/descriptions.
- Identify interrelationships between doctrinal claims within theological systems.
- Understand theological ideas as having a history and examining several examples, particularly regarding Christology.
- Draw upon theological descriptions to articulate an emerging constructive/systematic theology

Accommodations

- Garrett-Evangelical is committed to providing a quality theological education and will provide reasonable accommodations for documented conditions. Students requiring specific assistance such as classroom changes, alternative ways of note-taking, different classroom procedures, or alternative testing formats are urged to request the appropriate accommodations from the director of academic studies/registrar. The director of academic studies/registrar can advise students on other support services and resources, for example, diagnostic testing. Students must complete a request for accommodations using the form available from the director of academic studies/registrar or through myGETS documenting their condition(s) through appropriate verification methods.

Readings:

Required:

- Benjamin Valentine, ed. *In Our Own Voices: Latino/Latina Renditions of Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010. [isbn: 978-1570758904, Orbis, \$26.00]
- James Evans. *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016. [isbn: 978-0800698782, Fortress, \$29.00]
- Brian Bantum. *The Death of Race: Building a New Christianity in a Racial World*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016. [isbn: 978-1506408880, Fortress, \$16.99]
- Mercy Oduyoye. *Introducing African Women's Theology (selections available on Moodle)*

Assignments:

Pre-reading reflection (20%) – see below

Daily Questions/reflections (20%) – each class period a selection of quotes or reflection

Comparison Paper (30%) – 5-6 page paper describing similarities or differences between two approaches to a doctrine.

Constructive Theology Paper (30%) – 5-6 pages, instructions to be provided during the first week of class.

Pre-Reading:

Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, Introduction

Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, Ch. 2

Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, Prologue-Ch. 1

*The assigned pre-readings discuss the nature of theology, who is God, and creation. Write a 3-4 page (11-12pt font) reflection. In the reflection consider the differences or similarities in each theologians' approach to theology. What shapes the concerns of each author? How are these concerns reflected in their descriptions of God?

Class Schedule:

Week 1: Week one will meet each day from 9am to 1pm. Readings will include 30-40 pages per night. You should come to class with 2-3 passages from the readings that were intriguing or you found confusing.

January 13 – Topics: What is Theology? Who is God?

Readings:

W.E.B. DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*
Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, Ch. 2
Kallistos Ware
Karl Barth, "The Jewish Problem and the Christian Answer"

January 14 – creation, trinity, fall

Readings:

Gregory of Nyssa
Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*
Trible, "Reading Genesis 2-3"
Mercy Oduyoye, Ch. 5

January 15 – person and work of Jesus

Readings:

Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*
Mercy Oduyoye, Ch. 4
Ireneaus of Lyon
Athanasius

January 16 – atonement, resurrection, church

Readings:

Bonaventure, *Tree of Life*
Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*
Mercy Oduyoye, Ch. 6

January 17 – sacraments, baptism, eucharist, eschatology

Readings:

Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, "Kin-dom of God"
Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*
Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*

January 21-24

Week 2 will revisit key doctrines, but through the lens of different readings (primarily Evans, Bantum, and other selections). Each day will include assigned readings and reflections with required questions to be posted to a daily discussion board on Moodle. "Lectures" will be recorded responses to the questions (or the overall themes of the questions) posted. A more detailed schedule with directions will be provided in January. Plan on spending approximately 3-4 hours reading and writing with 1-1.5 hour recorded responses each day during the second week. All work and lectures will be offered in an asynchronous format.

