

## THEO 850: THEOLOGIES OF BLACK LIFE

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Office Hours: by appointment

### Course Description:

This course will examine theologies that emerge from black diasporic existence in America. Examining both theologies within a frame of historical development as well as examples of current questions and answers regarding theological explications of black life, we will ask how black life is imagined and re-imagined in response to the denials of its humanity, and how understandings of God shape and are shaped by realities of suffering, survival, and hope, whether in wide movements or everyday modes.

### *Learning Objectives*

- Identify significant themes in theological articulations of black life in America.
- Examine development and relationships between historical development of black theology and contemporary theological, religious, or spiritual explications of black life.

### Course Readings:

#### *Required*

- Alice Walker. *The Color Purple*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. [isbn: 978-0151191543, \$0.00-\$7.89] \*any edition is acceptable
- Toni Morrison. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Vintage, 1992. [isbn: 978-1400033423, Amazon, \$13.49]
- Katie G Cannon, and Anthony B Pinn. *Oxford Handbook of African American Theology*. Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2014. [isbn: 978-0190917845, Amazon, \$47.72, free online library access] \*readings from this text will be assigned throughout the semester. There will be an updated syllabus a week before classes begin to reflect these additions.

\*Remaining readings will be provided as pdfs on Moodle. Each week's reading will be a selection of 2 chapters from the assigned readings. For those books that are of particular interest I would highly recommend purchasing the entire text.

### Assignments:

Article Presentation/Paper (30%) – Each week one or two students will provide a brief presentation on the week's readings. Presentations should highlight a key passage and work to exegete or analyze what is at stake for the author in that particular passage. The second part of the presentation should also begin to connect this analysis to another reading in the class, either as overlap or contrast. Presentations should be 3-4 pages (5-6 for doctoral students) double-spaced pages. Citations should be parenthetical.

#### *For Master's Students*

Questions/Connections (30%) – For the week that you are not presenting on a text, you will turn in 150-200 words, with a list of questions/observations that emerge in considering the texts you've

read so far. The purpose of this paper is to simply reflect on any emerging themes or questions. (P/F)

*For Doctoral Students*

Sample Syllabus (30%) - You will create a syllabus for an undergraduate course on Black Christian Thought/Life or Religious Studies (class can be adapted to student's discipline).

Final Paper (40%)

Students will offer a final paper (2000-3000 words for masters students, 2500-4000 words for doctoral students). This paper can provide a close reading of a passage, provide a comparative analysis of two authors, or be an article tailored towards public outlets such as NPR, Christian Century, or The Atlantic, for example. I am open to additional forms of engagement as well.

Schedule:

On September 7th we will begin with a brief welcome and introduction to the course, assignments, structure, etc. Come to class on the 7th having read James Baldwin's short story "Sonny's Blues" and Chapter 3 of the Oxford Handbook of African American Theology, "African American Religious Experience" by Shawn Copeland.

We will meet most weeks online using Microsoft Teams. Once a month there will be an opportunity for in-person class meetings. Those dates are to be determined and online options will be available for all classes.

**Part I. Womanist Readings of Black Life**

Week 1 (September 7)

Introduction

James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"

Introduction and Ch. 3, *Oxford Handbook of African American Theology*

Week 2 (September 14)

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

Week 3 (September 22)

Katie Canon, *Black Womanist Ethics*

Week 4 (September 28)

Shawn Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience*

Week 5 (October 5)

Delores Williams, *Sisters In the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*

**Part II. The Liberation**

Week 6 (October 12)

James Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*

Week 7 (October 19)

Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*

### **Part III. Black Religion and Black Theology?**

Week 8 (October 25)

Charles Long, *Significations*

Week 9 (November 1)

Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness*

Week 10 (November 8)

Tamura Lomax, *Jezebel Unhinged*

### **Part IV. Improvisations on a Theme**

Week 11 (November 15)

Ashon Crawley, *Black Pentecostal Breath*

Week 12 (November 22) (no class, break)

*There are no assignments for this week. Rest, walk, catch up on work, get ahead on work, breathe, enjoy.*

Week 13 (November 29)

Willie James Jennings, *Christian Imagination*

Week 14 (December 6)

Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*