theo 500
introduction to theology

Modality: in person
Term: January 2026
Dates: January 12-16, 9am-4pm (class ends at 1pm on the 16th)

Instructor: Dr. Brian Bantum | brian.bantum@garrett.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

Course Structure

Monday-Thursday, 9am to 4pm
Friday, 9am-1pm

Course Rhythms: Our days together will be a combination of lecture, individual and group work, and discussion, as well as in-class exercises. I can understand that an eight hour day of theology for five days a week might feel a little overwhelming. My approach to theology is one of journey, questions, dialogue, and experimentation. This week will not be days and days of frantically taking notes. That said, there will be some lecture and we will be covering a lot of ground pretty quickly. In this process, I ask you to come with questions, an open mind, and a willingness to move through ambiguities. I will be available throughout the week for questions or concerns.

Preparing for the week:
Prior to our first meeting you have two assignments.

1. Read and journal through *The Death of Race* and selected chapters from Mercy Oduyoye's *Introducing African Women's Theology*
2. Complete theology "quiz"

Instructions:
1) Reading and Journal

In the two weeks prior to class, read Brian Bantum's *The Death of Race* and the selected chapters from Mercy Oduyoye's *Introducing African Women's Theology*. (The chapters are short, and if you read one chapter per day it should be pretty manageable.) As you read, keep a journal, reflecting on key passages, moments that gave you pause, questions that arose. Journal entries don't need to be long, maybe a quote and a few sentences about what stood out to you. Both books are very accessible and my hope is that you would approach them devotionally. Some questions you could reflect on as you read are:

- *What is the story you've been formed into about who you are and who God is?*

- *How are these texts telling a different story? As you read think about how each author describes the theological task, who is God, what is a human being? What do they no describe? What are the resources they draw upon?*

Before the first day of class you will be asked to self-report what percentage of the reading and how many entries you completed. You don't need to turn in your journals.

2) Theology "Quiz"

In addition to your journals you will complete a short quiz online asking you to provide a few sentences describing your understanding of several theological terms. There is no right or wrong answer for this quiz. It is simply a way to give me a sense of the theologies and viewpoints you are bringing into class with you.

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

- 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
- Draw upon theological descriptions to articulate an emerging constructive/systematic theology.

Required Books

- Brian Bantum. *The Death of Race: Building a New Christianity in a Racial World*. Grand Rapids: *Fortress Press, 2016 [isbn: 978-1506408880 , Amazon, $16.99]*
- Dorothy Soelle. *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology.* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, *2015 [isbn: 978-1498295765, Amazon, $18.59]*
- Kallistos Ware. The Orthodox Way. Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 2018 [isbn: 978- 0881416299, Amazon, $18.00]
- Additional readings will be available on Moodle

Grading/Assignments

- **Journal (10 points):** On the day before class there will be a link that allows you to post a brief self-assessment of how much of the pre-work you were able to read and how many journal entries you were able to complete.

- **Pre-Quiz (10 points):** Completion of the preliminary quiz receives full credit.

- **Comparative Theological Exercise (30 points):** The midweek assignment will provide an opportunity to examine two theologians and their understanding of a single theological doctrine. The aim here is to begin to consider how their "system" hangs together, what problems it tries to address, and what it begins to point to in terms of who God is and what the Christian life ought to look like. You will consider the doctrine of God and creation for Mercy Oduyoye and Kallistos Ware. Drawing on the readings for each theologian so far in the class, how do the two doctrines relate to each other? How do you see the methods or approaches or problems shaping their thought about who God is and what creation is. We will have time during the class to write and reflect on these similarities and differences and discuss them together as a class. You will have the opportunity to type and/or revise these reflections to submit by the next day (grade is based on understanding of each theologian's ideas, attention to detail in interpretation and comparison, analysis of the relationships between the doctrines and the differences between the theologians)

- **Visual Theology Project: (50 points)** The visual theology project will guide you through a series of exercises that ask you to connect critical reflection on theological concepts with reflective practices of creation and meditation. These exercises will not be graded on "artistic" ability, but rather the quality of reflection and connections demonstrated, and how those reflect an understanding of critical concepts. More information will be provided on the first day of class.

Grading Scale: 100-93=A, 92-90=A-, 89-87=B+, 86-83=B, 82-80=B-, 79-77=C+, 76-73=C, 72-70=C-, 69-67=D+, 66-63=D, 62-60=D-

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Schedule

The class is organized around the doctrinal loci of Christian faith. I have distilled these loci into questions rather than assertions with the hope that in each section we might begin to ask the questions of those we read, as well as ourselves and our tradition.

You will not be able to complete all of the readings for each section in our limited time for this intensive. Throughout the class we will highlight key passages and you can read full chapters in the evenings or after the class concludes.

daily schedule* *Each day we will begin class at 9am. Mornings will be comprised of 3-4 sessions that circulate around a central doctrinal question. There will be breaks throughout the morning and we will have a scheduled lunch each day at 12:30 or 1. After lunch until 4pm will be reserved for additional questions and the visual theology project.*

Monday, January 12

Question 1: What is theology? What shapes our ideas about God?

Soelle, Ch. 1-4
Ware, Prologue
W.E.B. DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*

Question 2: Who is God?

Barth, "The Jewish Problem and the Christian Answer"
Ware, Ch. 1
Oduyoye, Ch. 2-3

Question 3: What is creation? Who is the one who creates?

Soelle, Ch. 5
Deloria, "The Problem of Creation"
Ware, Ch. 3 (stop at heading "Man as Body, Soul, Spirit")

Tuesday, January 13

Question 4: One God, Three Persons?

Nicene Creed
Augustine, "On the Trinity"

Tanner, "Trinity"Ware, Ch. 2

Question 5: What is a human being
Ware, Ch. 3 (begin at heading "Man as Body…" stop at "Evil, Suffering…")
Oduyoye, Ch. 3

Question 6: What happened to God's good creation? What went wrong?
Bonhoeffer, "The Fall"
Ware, Ch. 3 ("begin at "Evil, Suffering… to end of Ch. 3)
Soelle, Ch. 6

Wednesday, January 14

Question 7: What child is this? Who is Jesus?
James Cone, "Black Power and Black Theology"
Howard Thurman, "Jesus and the Disinherited"
Ware, Ch. 4 (stop at "Obedient unto Death")
Soelle, Ch. 7-9

Question 8: How does Jesus save? What is salvation?
Turman, "Womanist Christologies"
Ireneaus
Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*
Thurman*, "Love"*
Soelle, Ch. 10

Question 9: How is death redeemed?
Bonaventure, *Tree of Life*
Japinga - Feminism and Atonement
Ware, Ch. 4 (begin at heading "Obedient unto Death" to end of Ch.)
Soelle, Ch. 11

Thursday, January 15

Question 10: Resurrection. What of our bodies? New creation?
Ware, Ch. 5

Question 11: What is the church? What is this new creation?
Oduyoye, Ch. 6
Soelle, Ch. 12-13

Question 12: What are the ways we participate in this new creation?
Soelle, Ch. 14
Bonhoeffer, On Baptism
Mennonite Confession of Baptism
Ware, Ch. 6

Question 13: What is our life now? What will it be? The ends and beginnings.
Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*

Soelle, Ch. 15
Ware, Epilogue

Friday, January 16

Question and response, beginning work on visual theology project.

Assignment Descriptions and Grading

Comparative Theology Project (30 points) - In this exercise you will analyze 2 passages from two different theologians. In your analysis, identify the theological "problem" or emphasis displayed in each set of quotes, describe the internal relationship of each theological idea (how one theological idea is related to and built upon the other), and then compare each set of quotes identifying one or two key points of difference in either approach or theological construction.

Your process of comparison can be a paper, chart, "mind map," or some combination of these as long as it conveys how you understand the key ideas displayed in each passage, conveys a way of describing the internal relationship, and can demonstrate a comparison and contrasting of the two different theologians.

You will have 90 minutes in class to complete the comparison (approximately 30 minutes per sections) The project is due Wednesday morning by the beginning of class. The should be uploaded to Moodle as either uploaded picture or file.

Grading is based on:

1) Understanding of each theologian (10 points)
2) Clear and specific insight into the internal relationship of the theologian's ideas. (10 points)
3) Clear points of comparison and difference. (10 points)

Visual Theology Exercises (20 points) - Each day in class we will explore a different visual medium. These exercises are intended to encourage reflection on the material for the day as well as practice with different visual art mediums. At the conclusion of each day upload an image and a brief reflection responding to the provided prompts. All submissions are credit/no credit. (5 points each, 20 points total)

****Thursday's reflection will be based on the visual theology project structure and will receive some feedback to help guide you as work on the fuller project in the following week.*

Visual Theology Project (30 points) -

The visual theology project is a sequence of 5 images that, taken together, visualize your emerging theology (the story your theology tells). Each image should correspond to a specific doctrinal loci (each sessions central question). You can build from the practices/pieces you created during the week during the week, or create new pieces. For each image, write 200-250 words describing the

theological ideas you are trying to display. In these short descriptions be sure to site at least 1-2 passages from the readings or lectures that you are trying to work through (either in agreement or as problems to solve for.)

The images and text should be incorporated into a single Word or PDF document and uploaded to Moodle (see Moodle for specific date.)

The final project is graded on:

1. your understanding of the theologians and course material (15 points)
2. clarity of relationship between the image and your description (10 points)
3. Completion - attention to detail in creation of images (5)

Final Grade Scale:

A	94-100	B+	87-89 (88)	C+	77-79 (78)
A-	90-93 (91.5)	B	84-86 (85)	C	74-76 (75)
		B-	80-83 (81.5)	C-	70-73 (71.5)
				D (Failing)	60-69 (65)

Additional Policies

Academic Policies
All students are required to abide by the academic policies detailed in the Academic Handbook for the current academic year. The following policies are of particular importance to the successful completion of one's coursework:

Writing

- **Academic integrity and plagiarism:** (See 2425 Handbook, 13, 69-75) All professors are required to respond to all suspected incidents of academic dishonesty, especially plagiarism. Repeated incidents of plagiarism or academic dishonesty may result in dismissal from the school.

- **Writing and citations:** The Turabian Manual for Writers and the Chicago Manual of Style footnote/bibliography format provide the standard formats for all introductory courses. Basic information on these formats is available online here. In advanced courses an instructor may require another style guide appropriate to the discipline (such as APA). (2425 Handbook, 71)

- **Writing Support:** The Writing Center at Garrett-Evangelical offers programs to support all students' theological research and writing. See https://www.garrett.edu/student-life/student-services "Writing Center" for more detailed information.

Attendance and Class Participation

- **Inclusivity/Diversity:** The basic commitments of the seminary to mutual love and searching for the truth in Christ lead to a principle that in the classroom and in course assignments, persons are always to be respected and ideas are to be freely discussed....All participants in the teaching-learning process have an obligation to honor and respect varying perspectives on relevant issues. (See 2425 Handbook, 10-11)

- **Attendance and lateness policies:** Attendance is required. Students who miss more than 20% of the class sessions (e.g., more than 2 classes in the weekly schedule, a proportionate amount for other class formats) should not expect to pass the class. (2425 Handbook, 20-21)

- Some faculty may limit on the usage of electronic devices such as cell phones during class. At the least, all devices should be silenced during the whole of a class session.

Academic Accommodations

- Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary is committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact the Director of Academic Support and Student Thriving (melanie.baffes@garrett.edu or 847-866-3869) to get started with the established accommodation process. If you are a continuing student who has already established accommodations with Student Access, you should receive a copy of your access letter at the start of the semester when it is emailed to the faculty member of each course you are enrolled in. Please contact your instructors prior to the first class session so the instructor can work with you to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential under FERPA regulations, so no one other than the access coordinator, Academic Affairs staff, and your professors will see your accommodation letter (2425 Handbook, 13).
- **Extensions:** For Masters students, extensions, if granted, are normally for four weeks following the last day of class in spring and fall semesters or the final due date for coursework for January and summer terms. Extensions may not exceed three months following the end of the term. (2425 Handbook, 21)

AI Policy

This course uses AI in the following ways:

Not Allowed	Allowed with appropriate acknowledgment	Allowed and no acknowledg needed

• Generative AI help with pape (generating topics, ideas, out arguments)
  • Generative AI help with w (paraphrasing, summarizi generating language for assignments)
  • Generative AI help with re (summarizing or outlining assignments)
  • Language translation
  • Language assistance for n native English speakers
  • Editing, polishing, or revi paper drafts
  • Proofreading
  • Presentation design
  • Citation generation
  • Research
	• Language assistance for n native English speakers	• Note taking

You must consult the professor(s) for uses not mentioned above.		
To properly cite the use of AI in Chicago/Turabian style, access this link: https://www.chicagor data/faq/topics/Documentation/faq0422.html.		

***In this class, AI is acceptable for translation into English if English is not your primary language. If you use a translation tool, please include the text in your first language.

The use of AI in written or visual work in any other case is not accepted. Our work together is centered on a process of engaging readings, concepts, and connections. The use of AI diminishes the opportunity for you to grow from asking questions of the text and wrestling with the interactions between texts and with your own formation and experience. I realize there are times when ideas can feel confusing or family circumstances emerge that make the use of AI or other people's ideas more broadly feel like the only option. But if you find

yourself overwhelmed for any reason, please feel free to reach out to me and we can work on a way of completing the work and the class.