THEO 363 Contemporary Christian Thought Online
Azusa Pacific University: Undergraduate School of Religion

Fall 2009 3 Units
Location: http://online.apu.edu
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Office Hours: If you need to meet with me in person, contact me so we can arrange a time and place to meet.
Please note that contacting me at the earthlink email address rather than the apu.edu address results in a quicker response.

Azusa Pacific Mission Statement: Azusa Pacific University is an evangelical Christian community of disciples and scholars who seek to advance the word of God in the world through academic excellence in liberal arts and professional programs of higher education that encourage students to develop a Christian perspective of truth and life.

Course Description: This course explores recent Christian thinking concerning the important issues facing the church in the modern world. Emphasis is placed on the 20th century and today’s Western, post-Christian culture. Meets general studies core doctrine requirements for God’s Word and the Christian response. Prerequisite: three units of biblical studies and CMIN 108, PHIL 220, UBBL 100, and UBBL 230 or equivalent.

Student Learning Outcomes:
Some people spend the majority of their lives exploring the topics of this class. With that in mind, by the end of our 15 weeks together students should be able to…
- think like a theologian
- identify the key features of recent theological movements and their relation to past movements
- explain the interplay of historical particulars and thought that typifies theology
- critically engage and analyze the ideas presented and developed in class
- identify key figures and streams of thought that have contributed to the changing face of theological work

THEO Desired Faith Integration Outcome: All in all, students will be asked to demonstrate that they have given thoughtful consideration to certain current and historical issues in light of the church’s scriptures and traditions. As they so it is expected that they will demonstrate that they understand that disciplined Christian faith is multiform: it is personal, social, spiritual, historical, doctrinal, biblical, practical, and takes shape in the network of relations that make up the life of the church. Students will come to greater clarity concerning the personal; and social relevance and spiritual richness that informed and disciplined theological discourse may bring to their lives among others in the time and space in which they live. This is coherent with the university-wide student learning goals that graduates should articulate a Christian view of truth
and life; should apply scriptural reasoning to problems; should appreciate, understand, and love the church; should practice love for all persons, appreciating personal and cultural differences, demonstrate truth-telling and grace in their relationships; and articulate the importance of fellowship between persons—locally and globally.

**THEO Desired Learning Outcomes:**
1. Undergraduate Students will demonstrate an ability to give thoughtful consideration to the issues of the past and present in light of the church’s scriptures and traditions.
2. Graduates should demonstrate a practice of continual intellectual growth through personal scholarship and development.

Conducting this class online offers opportunities not available in an “on the ground” class, but similarly there are interactions and opportunities that we will miss because we will not meet face to face. Please be sure to go over the syllabus to know what is expected of you, how to participate, and note the nature of assignments and when they are due so we can take full advantage of the features available to us in an electronic class.

**“How to Use This Class”**
Each week has written introductory material, a set of readings and accompanying numbered questions for your Reading Responses (for the Reading Response format, see below under Course Requirements). Read the introductory material and the questions so you have a sense of how to approach the readings.

You are always expected to do the reading, however you may do any or none of the questions for any given week. Since you are required to do 15 Reading Responses in all, during any given week you may or may not have done a reading response (there are more than 15 possibilities over the semester). Bear in mind, you may do more than 15, but only your top 15 scores will count toward your grade. It is entirely up to you to determine which 15 you will do, but remember that reality has a way of interfering with your plans—I’d recommend you not wait to do the last 15.

Reading Responses for a given week are due by midnight Wednesday for the week they are assigned. For example, any Reading Responses for Week 2 are due by midnight Wednesday, September 16th.

In addition to the Reading Responses, you are required to interact with each other and me. This interaction will count toward the Participation portion of your grade and will take place via threaded discussions. Whether you choose to do a reading response or not during any given week, you are required to do the reading. Odds are good you will have questions about those readings. Post these questions by midnight Tuesday (see the introductory material for Week 1 to see what makes a good critical question).
Additionally, you will see other student’s anonymized Reading Responses on which you are to comment (see the introductory material for Week 1 to see what makes a good substantive comment). You are to post these comments by midnight Thursday.

With the exception of the very first week, each week is counted from Saturday to Friday.

Refer to the course schedule in this syllabus and in the course homepage.

Introductory and background material for each week are subject to change prior to the week that it is covered. That is, if you are curious during Week 5 to see what we will be covering in Week 9, feel free to look it over, but be aware that it may have changes made to it before we get to Week 9.

**Required Texts/Readings:**

The following texts are available in the APU bookstore:


**If you are a theology major, I suggest that you buy as many of the following that are available and affordable. Otherwise, the readings will be emailed to you throughout the course and are freely available online at:**

<http://groups.apu.edu/theophil>.


**Course Requirements:**
Reading the material before and participating in thoughtful reflection and discussion of the ideas and challenges found in each.

15 one-page Reading Responses reflecting upon the main points of a reading. The Reading response questions are listed in the syllabus and in each unit page for the week in which they are due. Your grade will be based on how well and succinctly you address the topic. You may turn in as many as you like but your top 15 will count toward your final grade. Please limit your responses to one page. You may use single-spacing if you choose, do not use a font smaller than 10 pt. If you are going over the single page limit, you are probably saying too much or moving away
from the answer. It helps to construct a very simple thesis statement that includes the components of the question. Make sure what you write immediately relates to the answer in your thesis statement.

One 6-8 page Paper reflecting on a conceptual theme of *The Road* as it relates to theological concerns. We will go over exactly what those conceptual themes may be the third week of class. Due **October 30th**.

One Paper offering a brief theological analysis on a specific problem or perspective of your choosing. The course material may serve as a primary source but outside research is expected. The paper should be no more than 10, and no less than 8 pages exclusive of any cover page or endnotes. Use a 12-point Times font for the body. Please use the Turabian method for citation using either endnotes or footnotes. **Do NOT use parenthetical references**. Please, please, please, cite your sources. A one-page proposal with preliminary sources is due **October 23rd**. **The final draft is due Dec. 9th**.

**Participation** via threaded discussions covering the class readings and student reading Responses. Your grade will be based in part on the number of posts you make, but more attention will be paid to how well your questions further the discussion and contribute to a theological reflection on the material. Since there is potentially an infinite number of comments that may be made about any piece and we are limited, we will generally focus on four questions. This means, of the student questions submitted for a week, I will will choose four that I think build the themes of the class and material. However should other questions need to be answered, we may cover more. Ask good questions.

Once the four questions have been posted we will attempt to answer them as well as we can. You will post your answers to these questions and discussion on these topics will continue until Friday. The themes that you develop through the week, as well as the points I emphasize will make up material you will need to know for the final.

Similarly, the comments on anonymized Reading Responses are part of your participation grade and class material as well.

**Final Exam** over the material of the semester. The final exam will be a timed exam, submitted electronically. Given the nature of the course, you will be allowed to use any of your notes and refer to the readings of the course, however the nature of the final questions will require you to show how well you can integrate the course material.

**FINAL WEDNESDAY December 16, 12:15-2:15PM**

Any student in this course who has a disability that might prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should meet with an advisor in the Learning Enrichment Center (ext 3849) as soon as possible to initiate disability verification and discuss accommodations that might be necessary to ensure full participation in the successful completion of course requirements.
Students are encouraged to make use of the resources available at the Writing Center offices located in the Marshburn Library on East Campus. The Writing Center is available to help students with all aspects of their writing projects.

**Grading:**
Grades will be determined by how well you demonstrate your familiarity and engagement with the ideas and material covered. It is not necessary that you accept or agree with any of the ideas covered or developed in class, but that you struggle to understand the place and role of the ideas in a broader theological picture.

- Paper 25 %
- Final Exam 20%
- Reading Responses 20%
- Participation 20%
- *The Road* Paper 15%

Grades will be based upon the following scale and a standard distribution:

- 90-100  A
- 80-89   B
- 70-79   C
- 60-69   D
- Below 59  F

**Course Policies:**
- **Make up work:** Late work will not be accepted and make up exams will not be given.
- **Incomplete:** Except in extreme cases it is better to drop or withdraw from a class than imagine that the coursework will be completed after the semester has ended and a new one begun. If you anticipate not being able to complete the class work, drop or withdraw from the class.

**Academic Integrity:** “The mission of Azusa Pacific University includes cultivating in each student not only the academic skills that are required for a university degree, but also the characteristics of academic integrity that are integral to a sound Christian education. It is therefore part of the mission of the university to nurture in each student a sense of moral responsibility consistent with the biblical teachings of honesty and accountability. Furthermore a breach of academic integrity is viewed not merely as a private matter between the student and instructor but rather as an act that is fundamentally inconsistent with the mission and purpose of the entire university. A complete copy of the Academic Integrity Policy is available in the Office of Student Life, the Office of the Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Programs, and online.”

That is to say, cheating is bad for you. Any instance of cheating will at least result in a failing grade for the course.
Course Schedule:

Week 1
Course overview and perspective
Theological Background of Modernity

Week 2
Hegel 205-253
1. What is the source of the distinction Hegel makes between love and law, and what difference does this make for the distinction between Judaism and Christianity?
Schleiermacher 1-21
2. How does Schleiermacher distinguish religion from philosophy and ethics and what does he identify as its (religion’s) source?
Kierkegaard 189-251
3. What is subjectivity and why does Kierkegaard say truth is subjectivity?
(Last day to add/drop classes Sept. 18)

Week 3
Rahner: 44-89
4. For Rahner, how is it that knowledge of God is experienced but also transcendent?
Kelly “Have You Ever Seen a Miracle?” “Children of The Light,” in The Eternal Promise
5. What is spiritual maturity for Kelly and why is this miraculous?
Ch. 1-3 in Althaus-Reid, et al,
7. Broadly, what are the existential conditions of contemporary theological work? Gutierrez 23-34
7. According to Gutierrez, what is the task and purpose of theology?

Week 4
Hauerwas A Community of Character 9-35
8. What does Hauerwas mean by saying the church is a narrative community, that is, what does he mean by narrative and why does it matter to theology?
Barth Evangelical Theology 3-59
9. What is the object of theology and why would it resist systematization?
Barth Evangelical Theology 63-105
10. According to Barth, what is faith?
Barth Evangelical Theology 109-156
11. How does Barth identify and propose to overcome the various threats to theology?
Week 5
Barth *Evangelical Theology* 159-206
12. What is the work *evangelical* theology does for and in the community?
Geertz 42-67
13. What is the distinction Geertz makes between anti-relativism and anti-anti-relativism; why does he make this distinction?
Martey in Althaus-Reid, et al, 80-93
14. How does Martey’s essay demonstrate the dialectic or ongoing nature of the theological task?

Week 6
Barth *The Humanity of God* (essay II)
15. For Barth, how and why do the theological “mistakes” of the past inform our present theological work?
Barth *The Humanity of God* (essay II)
16. According to Barth, how and why does God’s deity include His humanity?

Week 7
PAPER PROPOSALS DUE
Barth *The Humanity of God* (essay III)
17. What does Barth mean by saying God’s freedom is not unlimited possibility and what does this mean for the freedom of humanity?
Kelly All of Chapter 3 (Essays 1-4)
18. How does “negative space” correspond to silence and “hastening into the world” in Christian existence?
Kelly “American Christianity,” “Christians and Decided Christians,” “Excerpts from the Richard Cary Lecture,” in *The Eternal Promise*
19. Considering the inward nature of spirituality, why does Kelly claim that the Gospel must have a social expression?
Geffré in Althaus-Reid 39-51
20. According to Geffré, what are the opportunities for religious transformation possible within Modernity?

Week 8
Discussion of theological themes in *The Road*/Papers due,
Hauerwas *After Christendom* Intro, 13-68
21. According to Hauerwas, what is the difference between a tactical and a strategic position and why must the church’s position be a tactical one?
Sung in Althaus-Reid, et al, 67-79
22. According to Sung, what is the faith/ethic implicit in neo-liberalism and how might it be overcome?
Week 9
Hauerwas *After Christendom* 69-92
23. What does Hauerwas say is the difference between freedom of religion and the freedom of the church and why is it a problem to confuse the two?
Hopkins in Althaus-Reid, et al, 94-101
24. According to Hopkins, how do neo-conservative and liberal theologies in the US support a religion of monopoly capitalism and what is the prophetic response?
Hauerwas *After Christendom* 93-111
25. What is the discipline Hauerwas claims is essential to being the church, why?

Week 10
Hauerwas *After Christendom* 113-131
26. What is the difference between a Christian and non-Christian understanding of marriage and what does this have to do with Christian politics?
Althaus-Reid in Althaus-Reid, et al, 23-38
27. According to Althaus-Reid, why is every theology a sexual act?
Hauerwas *After Christendom* 133-152
28. According to Hauerwas, to what is the church a witness and why is this witness necessary? (NOTE: It is not “non-believers”.)
Kelly “The Gathered Meeting” in *The Eternal Promise*
29. How and why does Kelly suggest mysticism as he describes it cannot be an individual affair? *(Last day to withdraw from classes Nov. 13th)*

Week 11
Kelly: “The Quaker Discovery” in *The Eternal Promise*.
30. What is immediacy of revelation and how is it expressed concretely?
Kirk-Duggan in Emilie Townes 140-166
31. According to Kirk-Duggan, how do blues and gospels exist theologically?
Kelly “Religion for a Distraught World” & “Where are the Signs of Hope?” in *The Eternal Promise*
32. How does Kelly's description of religious/religiously-motivated action in the world demonstrate a type of sacramentality?
Massey in Althaus-Reid, et al, 107-117
33. How does the example illustrated by Massey demonstrate the act of “doing theology”?
Week 12
Cone. *God of the Oppressed*
34. Why does Cone describe “secular” black experience as part of black theological discourse? Cone. *Liberation: A Black Theology of Liberation*
35. What does Cone mean by saying Jesus is “the eternal event of liberation in the divine person who makes freedom a constituent of human existence”?
Jordan 328-337
36. How is the apparent absence of rhetoric achieved in theological language and why is this dangerous?
Kelly “Quakers and Symbolism,” in *The Eternal Promise*
37. What are the problems Kelly identifies with symbols but why are they nonetheless necessary and helpful?

Week 13
Támez in Althaus-Reid, et al, 102-106
38. According to Támez, why is it fundamental to discuss the gender of God?
Hauerwas: *Sanctify Them In Truth*
39. According to Hauerwas, why is friendship an epistemological enterprise and what does this have to do with homosexuality?

Week 14
Deifelt in Althaus-Reid, et al, 118-130
40. How is religious language dangerously ideological?
Ruether 95-107
41. Why does Ruether claim it is essential for Christian theology that we not conceive of the crucifixion as something to be sought and accepted as a means of redemption?
Petrella in Althaus-Reid, et al, 162-177
42. Considering Petrella’s argument about the social sciences, why might theology be left behind for the sake of God’s saving work?

PAPERS DUE

Week 15
FINAL: WEDNESDAY December 16, 12:15-2:15PM

This is the clause that acknowledges that the nature of our existence may require changes be made to the syllabus during the semester.