

Christian Theology
Theo 6330
North Park Theological Seminary

Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, Professor
Fall Semester 2012

Instructor Information:

Location- Nyvall 16, 1st Floor (off Olsson Lounge)

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*I prefer email for contact. In emergency cases, call the above cell phone number.

Office Hours- Tues, Thurs (By appointment)

Course Description

An introduction to the doctrines, methods and tasks of Christian theology, seeking active appropriation of Christian faith in the context of the church and in engagement with the world. History prerequisite.

Course Objectives

- Students will become familiar with basic Christian doctrine in its historical development and systematic embodiment
- To practice the tools, texts and tasks of Christian theology
- To engage in both formal and informal theological conversation, allowing students to explore and deepen their participation in the faith of the church
- To connect clearly the necessity of theology to the life, ministry and mission of the church, and to grasp the theological dimension of students' various callings
- To investigate the relationship of theology and culture, including clarification of the way cultural processes of production and meaning affect Christian identity
- To generate knowledge and love of God, to empower faithful service, and to articulate hopeful witness

Course Texts

The following authors will be our fellow disciples and conversation partners this semester.

1. Bible, NRSV (all reading in public in class and for assignments should be **NRSV**)
2. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1958). ISBN: 0024021504.
3. Justo González and Zaida Maldonado Pérez, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Abingdon Press, 2002). ISBN 0687095735
4. Donald Frisk, *Covenant Affirmations* (Covenant Publications, 2003).
This book must be ordered through Covenant Publications:
<http://covbookstore.stores.yahoo.net/covafthisweb.html>
5. Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge, 2010). ISBN: 0521732778

6. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (HarperOne, 1989). ISBN: 9780061551826

Course Requirements

1. Class Participation. This includes coming to class prepared to discuss material and ask questions based on the reading. All reading for the week is to be completed by classtime. Note: If you miss more than one week of class, your overall course grade may be lowered. *If you miss more than 3 weeks of class, you will not pass this course.* Participants should plan on spending on average 70 hours for the semester for this course.

2. Essays

Throughout the semester, I will assign 3 essays (see options in document below). These papers will include analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the major themes in the course and the readings. They are approximately 4 pages (850-1000 words). Questions for each set of essays are at the end of the syllabus. See Calendar for due dates.

3. Final Paper

This paper is a short research paper that will address one question, to be determined in the last four weeks of class. The question should be one that in some way synthesizes the doctrines covered in this course (or another approved doctrine). Examples of questions include: How does Wright's understanding of hope challenge evangelical views of eschatology? How does the doctrine of the incarnation shape the sacramental practices of the church? Etc. The paper will in some way engage the Wright or Tanner book, along with at least 4 other scholarly sources to be included in your bibliography. See rubrics for grading criteria.

Grading

Grading breakdown is as follows:

Class Participation: 5%

Essays: 60% (20% each)

Final Paper: 35%

*Grade percentages operate as follows: A (93+), A- (90-92.9), B+ (87-89.9), B (83-86.9), B- (80-82.9), and so on.

Academic Honesty:

In keeping with our Christian heritage and commitment, North Park University is committed to the highest possible ethical and moral standards. Just as we will constantly strive to live up to these high standards, we expect our students to do the same. To that end, cheating of any sort will not be tolerated. Students who are discovered cheating are subject to discipline up to and including failure of a course and expulsion.

Our definition of cheating includes but is not limited to:

1. Plagiarism – the use of another's work as one's own without giving credit to the individual. This includes using materials from the internet.

2. Copying another's answers on an examination.
3. Deliberately allowing another to copy one's answers or work.
4. Signing an attendance roster for another who is not present.

In the special instance of group work, the instructor will make clear his/her expectations with respect to individual vs. collaborative work. A violation of these expectations may be considered cheating as well.

For further information on this subject you may refer to the Academic Dishonesty section of the University's online catalog.

Disabilities Accommodations

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the academic dean's office. Please do so as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely manner. For further information please review the following website: <http://www.northpark.edu/ada>

Calendar of Topics, Readings and Due Dates

Week 1	Theology: A Way of Discovery Reading: González and Pérez (ch. 1); Frisk (Faith)	August 28
Week 2	Theology: A Way of Discovery Reading: Augustine, <i>On Christian Doctrine</i> (all)	September 4
Week 3	Who is God? Reading: González and Pérez (ch. 2); Frisk (God; The Holy Spirit and Salvation)	September 11
Week 4	How does God reveal and communicate? Reading: Frisk (Revelation and the Word of God) Due: Essay 1	September 18
Week 5	What is the world and who are we? Reading: González and Pérez (ch. 3); Frisk (God, the World, and Our Humanity) & (Sin)	September 25
Week 6	Who is Jesus Christ? What did Christ do? Reading: González and Pérez (ch. 4); Frisk (Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior) & (The Work of Jesus Christ) Due: Essay 2	October 2
Week 7	What is the Church? Reading: González and Pérez (ch. 5);	October 9
Week 8	READING WEEK (no classes week of October 15)	
Week 9	How does the Church live? Reading: Frisk (The Church and Sacraments); González and Pérez (ch. 6)	October 23
Week 10	How does the Church hope? Reading: González and Pérez (ch. 7); Frisk (Eschatology) Due: Essay 3	October 30
Week 11	Putting it together: Nature, Grace, Incarnation, Trinity Reading: Tanner (ch. 1-3) Due: Ungraded Assignment. Bring to class a summary of the reading for this week, along with a draft of a list of questions that your final paper might address.	November 6
Week 12	Putting it together: Nature, Grace, Incarnation, Trinity Reading: Tanner (ch. 4, 6-7)	November 13

Due: Ungraded Assignment. Bring your refined list of possible questions for your final paper.

Week 13 Thanksgiving (no class) November 20
Reading: read ahead N. T. Wright

Week 14 Putting it together: Resurrection, Hope, Eschatology November 27
Reading: N. T. Wright (ch. 1-8)
Due: Ungraded Assignment. Bring to class a summary of the reading for this week, along with a draft of a list of questions that your final paper might address.

Week 15 Putting it together: Resurrection, Hope, Eschatology December 4
Reading: N. T. Wright (ch. 9-15)
Due: Ungraded Assignment. Bring your refined list of possible questions for your final paper.

Week 16 Finals Week December 11
*No class but I will be available for paper consultation.
Due: Final Paper, 12/13 (may be submitted any time after Monday, Dec. 10!).

Essay Assignments (Options for each paper below)

Overview

Three short papers (750-900 words) are assigned for the semester (worth 20% each). Each assignment offers several possible essay topics. Some topics are rooted in a story scenario drawn from pastoral ministry, others are more constructive in nature. Students must choose only one topic for each written essay.

Research? Neither Expected nor Needed!

I **don't** intend for these papers to require further reading! I'd rather see you interact with what is assigned than go read more material. However, if further reading would make you more confident, then read (at most) one or two short encyclopedia or dictionary articles, say from *The New Handbook of Christian Theology* or *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* or another quality reference work.

Submission Guidelines

- Papers can be submitted ANY TIME on the due date. If they are not brought to class as a hard copy (INCLUDE NAME AND BOX NUMBER), they must be submitted through **Moodle**.
- To turn in your writing assignments on Moodle, go to the Moodle homepage, click on the appropriate Essay Number, and submit your paper. You will also find your feedback there, by clicking on the grade in the gradebook. All documents should be **saved under your last name** and assignment title. Ex: Clifton Essay 1.doc).
- Students may have a one week extension on one paper without grade penalty. When you turn in a paper using your extension, please note "EXCUSED LATE PAPER" in the upper left corner and send me an email.

Format Guidelines:

These guidelines apply to each assigned essay.

- 3-4 **typewritten** pages (850-1000 words)
- **double**-spaced; your name and box number should appear at the top left corner of page 1; the paper number and question number should appear in the top right corner of page 1.
- use 12 point fonts, not **18 point** and not 8 point (if you get my point)
- No footnotes. If you quote a text, put the citation in parentheses.
- The *Student Academic Handbook* guides us to write in ways that "**use gender inclusive language when referring to people**. Such courtesy and sensitivity to audience should be presumed" (item 11 on p. 19). **Note the extra writing assignment for those who fail to comply.**
- Biblical quotations should use NRSV. If you do your own translating, be gender inclusive.

Essay 1

Due Tuesday, September 20

Choose one of the following questions and write on it.

1. Sometimes we hear the claim “it’s not so important what you believe as that you believe.” How does that square with a Christian understanding of believing and how does Christian doctrine fit into that? Discuss this (be sure to make reference to Augustine!).
(Option: If you want to focus your inquiry, think about how you would communicate an appropriate understanding of faith and believing to a confirmation class. Then write out the content of your presentation.)
2. How close can natural theology (that is, a theology built on natural revelation) get you to the Christian gospel?
3. One day you are talking with a member named Sol Scriptura. He says “Preacher, I know that you’re a real Bible believer. So I’m sure that I’ll never have to worry about you preaching any of that Trinity stuff. No *creed* but Christ, that’s my motto. Just preach what’s in the Bible.” Write out what you would want to say to Sol in response to his comments.
4. Compare and contrast the nature of the Trinity as it is understood in the Nicene or Apostles’ Creed and as it is depicted in Rublev’s icon of the Holy Trinity (http://www.rollins.edu/Foreign_Lang/Russian/rublev.html).
5. Look through the section of hymns in the “Pentecost” section of the hymnal (or choose a few hymns dealing with Pentecost from your tradition’s canon of music). Interacting with the hymns, write an essay on the theology of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology).

Essay 2

Due Tuesday, October 4

Choose one of the following questions and write on it.

1. A few years ago, the *Covenant Companion* ran an article on creation care by Joel Olfelt (April 2008, pp. 6-9 – accessible on Companion’s website). It provoked several letters suggesting that caring for creation has little or nothing to do with the gospel (July 2008, pp. 4, 36). Imagine that you are the pastor of one of these respondents, and write them a letter of theological guidance. The issue here is NOT to engage the scientific evidence for global warming, but rather the theological evidence for a human calling to care for God’s good creation.
2. Basil Ides is a member of the youth steering committee. There has been some exploration of whether the senior high curriculum should include a unit on human

sexuality. Basil says “the only thing we need to tell them is this: ‘your body’s always going to pull you down; you’ve got to continually seek to rise above it.’” Offer Basil a genuinely Christian theology of human bodies.

3. I remember from youth group two tendencies toward misunderstanding Jesus. One was to regard him as a ‘best bud,’ just another really cool, supremely useful guy. The other was to assume that Jesus was so divine, so holy, that he couldn’t possibly go through the kinds of struggles and temptations that we do. Help a youth group see how both these are wrong by presenting the basic content of the Chalcedonian definition.
4. What theology or theologies of atonement are at work in C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*? (Writing this question entails engaging the book, not the movie! Excellent responses will include brief quotations or references to specific passages [giving page numbers in parentheses].)
5. A woman in your parish – who is a recent follower of Christ - struggles to make sense of the death of Christ. Discuss the atonement with her, using Frisk’s metaphors to ground the discussion. In your answer, you must also address grace and sin.

Essay 3

Due Tuesday, November 2

Choose one of the following questions and write on it.

1. “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” What is your understanding of the inter-relationship of these three claims? Is the saving work of Jesus Christ limited to the first claim, or is it implicated in all three? A good response will include your understanding of the resurrection and return of Christ.
2. You are called to pastoral ministry, a calling that will someday bear the fruit of ordination to word and sacrament. To pastor a church you must have some idea of what a church is, so write an essay that answers the question “what is the church?” in a way that will help orient a theology of ordination.
3. What is a sacrament and why does it matter? Either answer for the instructor, or write a series of newsletter articles for your congregation. (Optional approach: Parents of an infant come to you for counsel on whether to baptize or dedicate their baby. Their question inspires you to write a newsletter to the whole congregation that articulates a theology of baptism. NOTE: Include a discussion of the sacraments, what they are, and why they matter.)
4. Lal Hindsey wants the youth to spend the next year focusing on the *Left Behind* series in senior high Sunday School. He says “It’s never too early to present the

basics about the end times, and *Left Behind* gets it just right. And on top of that, it's just plain exciting." Write a letter to Lal offering some guidance about both the full scope and the central content of Christian eschatology.

5. Reflect on the Season of Advent theologically. What doctrines does the season engage? Why is Advent and seasons important for the life of the church?