**Constructive Theology (IST 2010), Fall 2015**

Class Sessions - Wednesdays, 6:00-9:30 pm in Iliff Hall 201

Instructor - David N. Scott

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Consultation - By e-mail or scheduled appointment.

**Course Description**

This course provides an introduction to the content and tasks of Christian theology. It explores the discipline's varying criteria, methods and substantive proposals on what it has often taken to be the fundamental human questions. The primary purpose of the course is to enable students to develop a systematic statement of their own theological perspective. Key considerations in the production of this statement include: (1) its clarity, coherence, and capacity to illuminate experience; (2) its relationship to the resources and limitations of particular historical traditions and social locations; (3) its relationship to alternative perspectives; (4) the manner in which doctrines mutually inform and operate in conjunction with one another; and (5) its implications in terms of social and personal praxis.

**Course Objectives**

*Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to:*

1. Imaginatively engage the substantive proposals of Christian theology by carefully examining its classical and contemporary content, tasks, and methods.
2. Identify and explain issues currently shaping theological debate.
3. Consider the alternatives to a proposed approach to theology and recognize when the theological question under consideration needs to be restated or perhaps even rejected.
4. Apply theoretical considerations to history or practice.
5. Articulate a critical and carefully reasoned statement of one's own theological perspective with sensitivity to the systematic connections between doctrines.
6. Understand and articulate theological perspectives other than one's own with accuracy and generosity.

**Required Texts**

Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King, eds. *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, eds. *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

\*All other assigned readings will be made available through Canvas.\*

**Recommended Resources**

*These texts are part of the Ira J. Taylor Library reference collection*

Patrick W. Carey and Joseph T. Leinhard, eds. *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000.

Justo L. González. *Essential Theological Terms*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Donald K. McKim. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, 2nd Edition*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.

Ian A. McFarland, et al., eds. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, eds. *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003.

*These texts are on reserve at the Ira J. Taylor Library*

Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark Lewis Taylor, eds. *Reconstructing Christian Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994.

David Ford and Rachel Muers, eds. *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918, 3rd edition*. Madden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005.

Ed. L. Miller and Stanley Grenz. *Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998.

Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, eds. *A New Handbook of Christian Theologians*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.

(These texts may be found in the library’s stacks.)

**Course Requirements (At a Glance)**

Attendance/Participation 20%

Short Paper Presentation 15%

Profile of a Christian Theologian 25%

Theological Position Paper 40%

*Note:* Because I am an adjunct professor, I am unable to grant any student an incomplete for this course. See the Masters Student Handbook.

**Special Needs/ADA Statement**

Iliff engages in a collaborative effort with students with disabilities to provide reasonable accommodations for student needs. Students are encouraged to contact their assigned academic advisor to initiate the process of requesting accommodations. The advising center can be contacted at advising@iliff.edu or by phone at (303) 765-1146.

**Policies on Academic and Classroom Integrity**

All students are expected to abide by Iliff’s statement on Academic Integrity, as published in the Masters Student Handbook. Any detected plagiarism or cheating on an assignment (especially the final paper) will result in an automatic penalty of an "F" for that assignment.

When participating in class activities, all persons are expected to honor the values enumerated in Iliff’s Community Covenant. Proper in-class participation consists of contributions that facilitate the stated objectives for this course, especially objectives 5 and 6. The purpose of our learning community is to equip **each** student to articulate a theological perspective and to demonstrate understanding and generosity toward each of our peers, not in the absence of disagreement and passion, but in the midst of them. Accomplishing this purpose demands that all students do their best to discipline themselves concerning the content, frequency, and spirit of what they say:

* The **content** of a quality contribution will flow out of the discussion material for that day, be it an assigned reading, an instructor lecture, or a student presentation. Comments ought to remain relevant to this material and connect with the input and contributions of others. Personal stories and opinions, cultural references, humor -these things all have a place in constructive theological discussion, but only if they clarify or amplify the ideas at the center of a particular class session. This is why preparation is key: If everyone is on the same page (sometimes literally), then being understood and understanding others gets that much easier. Also, when disagreeing with a theological proposal, remember that **criticism is not the same as critique**. True critique aims to illuminate the most perceptive or impactful points in another's position rather than remaining content to point out just any detail one might find objectionable.
* Achieving the proper **frequency** of participation is a challenge in all forms of communication, but especially during academic engagement. Many students will need to push themselves to speak up regularly in the face of uncertainty, anxiety, and (yes, sometimes) boredom. Others will have to curb their contribution occasionally because they are naturally verbose or prone to argue. To these students, I can offer no better advice than these words of Dr. Antonio: "Be warned of the dangers of being besotted with the sound of your own voice and the appearance of your own ideas. This can lead to monopolizing the floor, over-participation, irrelevance and the exclusion and silencing of other voices." As the instructor, I will be sure to offer a tactful word of advice to students who habitually fall into either of these patterns of participation.
* By the **spirit** of one's remarks, I have in mind all those things that go into showing **respect** for an interlocutor. For me, it is a notion that brings together tone, intent, and specific types of content. Students should keep their comments free of hatred, slander, or discriminatory remarks. Each of us should be deliberate about which passions and convictions we give expression to in the classroom, rather than be impulsive or overly reactive. Students should almost always anticipate disagreement on sensitive topics and choose words that are charitable towards those with opposing viewpoints. Finally, all participants should use **inclusive language** in writing and in speech.

**Statement Regarding Electronic Devices**

During class, the use of cell phones is prohibited. Cell phones must be silenced or turned off for the duration of each session. Other electronic devices, such as a laptop, a tablet, a Kindle, or a Nook are allowed only as long as the student is using the device to take notes or to view electronic versions of course readings. The opportunity to use an electronic device in class is a privilege. Students who abuse this privilege will receive lowered attendance and participation scores or, in severe cases, the instructor may require that they leave the classroom. Since this is a masters-level course, my expectation is that extending these courtesies to our learning community will come naturally to each of us, and I hope that this statement proves to be an unnecessary portion of the syllabus.

**Course Requirements (Detailed Descriptions)**

*Attendance and Class Participation (20% of grade):* The discipline of theology is not merely a study of the history of certain ideas. More importantly, it is an ongoing conversation among persons who are committed to addressing theological problems and taking up continually questions about what it means to live faithfully in the context of day-to-day life. For that reason, regular attendance of class sessions and active engagement in class discussions are two essential components of this course. Both the quality and depth of theological conversation depend heavily on the voices involved. Students should come to each class session having read all the assigned readings for that day and having thoughtfully considered the ideas and arguments presented in those readings.

The instructor will regularly take attendance, both to give proper credit to those students who make attendance the priority it should be and to provide an additional measure of accountability for everyone. There are more comments regarding class participation above in the section "Policies on Academic and Classroom Integrity."

*Short Paper Presentations (15% of grade):* Each student will give an in-class presentation of a brief paper that critically engages one of the assigned readings for a particular class session. In roughly 3 double-spaced pages, the student must:

* Identify the central thesis of the author's theological proposal. This task often involves distinguishing passages of argument from passages of exposition.
* Summarize the most noteworthy points the author makes in support of this thesis.
* Provide a critical appraisal of the reading. When formulating this appraisal, the student should consider questions such as: How does this proposal resemble or deviate from traditional articulations of the doctrine(s) under discussion? As a work of constructive theology, what present-day issues or resources does the author emphasize? How internally coherent, clear, or convincing is this proposal in its own right? How might the adoption of this proposal promote or harm the life of faith communities?

These presentations will serve to focus and stimulate class discussion of the assigned readings. The instructor will grade each paper according to the accuracy of its presentation of the chosen reading, the quality of its analysis, and its own clarity and organization. To organize these presentations, students should make their contribution to the electronic sign-up sheet on Canvas at their earliest convenience.

*Profile of a Christian Theologian (25% of grade):* Because this is an introductory course that is structured topically, the assigned readings do not come close to representing every significant theologian or theological school that the syllabus might reasonably include nor is there the opportunity to dive deeply into the life's work of any individual theologian. In an effort to counterbalance these restrictions, each student will be required to compose and present a profile of a Christian theologian whose career began after 1900 CE. The written document must be roughly 3 double-spaced pages in length and the in-class presentation should last 15-20 minutes. Its content must include information from these three areas:

* **Biography** - historical and geographical context, significant life events, institutional or denominational affiliations, prominent engagements in the public square.
* **Theological Themes and Contributions** - signature ideas and innovations, major works, linkages between personal context and theological content, and noteworthy associations with a particular school of thought or relationships with other theologians.
* **Current Relevance** - considerations of this scholar's influence and the continued viability of his or her ideas for theological construction in the present day.

Unlike the short paper presentations, the student's in-class presentation of this profile does not have to be simply reading the written document. Students are encouraged to utilize other pedagogical tools, including handouts, media clips, presentation software (such as Prezi and PowerPoint), or interactive exercises that can be completed within the allotted time. Regarding media clips, a student might share a video or audio excerpt of an interview or address given by a theologian, a segment that offers explanation or critical response to this theologian's work, or a piece of popular media that illustrates or otherwise clarifies the importance a major theme or idea. Presentations will be evaluated according to how effectively they provide information and analysis of the chosen theologian's thought and method. Any instructional resource or activity that would distract or steal time from this end ought to be left out of the presentation. Students are free to choose which primary and secondary sources to consult when composing this profile. Whatever resources one chooses, a Works Cited page needs to be attached to the written document. Any well-known format is acceptable (Chicago, MLA, APA, etc.), as long as its use is consistent. When choosing a theologian, students ought to browse the texts listed above under "Recommended Resources."

To organize these presentations, students should make their contribution to the electronic sign-up sheet on Canvas at their earliest convenience

*Theological Position Paper (40% of grade):* The culminating project of this course is a term paper in which the student makes a substantive statement about the nature and practice of theology and articulates a critical theological statement that addresses one or more of the topics the course has covered. This theological position paper must be 8-10 double-spaced pages in length and consists of two parts:

* **Part I: What Is Theology?** (about 3 pages). Provide a definition or basic characterization of "theology" and defend it. Students may compose this themselves or defend one they encountered in the course readings or another theological publication. Building upon this conceptualization of theology, each student must formulate *his or her own method or an approach* to doing theology. This part of the paper needs to relate the stated approach or method to the student's social location and explicitly engage at least two of the assigned readings for Week 1. Students are encouraged to compose a rough draft of Part I early on and revise it as needed throughout the quarter.
* **Part II: Critical Proposal on Christian Doctrine** (about 5 pages). Use the approach or method developed in Part I to reflect constructively on one of the topics listed below. The questions listed after each topic provide a general orientation for reflection rather than a list of points each paper on this topic must address. Nevertheless, proposals should not stray far from the specific points these questions raise.
	1. **God and Creation**: What is God's relationship to the world? How ought "God" and "world" be defined? In what sense is God the "Creator" of the world? What reasons are there to hold on to the doctrines of God and Creation in the face of secular or scientific understandings of the world that exclude them?
	2. **Theological Anthropology**: Answer the question, "What does it mean to be human?" How does the doctrine of the *imago Dei* inform this matter? What is the content of that doctrine? Is a "person" something distinct from a human being? How does the life of Jesus Christ reveal true humanity? In formulating a proposal, address at least one of these dimensions of human existence: physical ability, cognitive ability, race, gender, sexuality, class.
	3. **Sin, Evil, and Redemption**: Does the doctrine of sin still have a place in Christian theology? Why or why not? What conceptual difference is there, if any, between the ideas of sin and evil? In theological terms, what does it means to be redeemed from sin and/or evil? What role does Jesus Christ play in this redemption?
	4. **Spirit**: Describe and analyze the idea that God is spirit. How ought theologians understand the faith claims that God's spirit dwells in us or among us? What is the "Holy Spirit?" Should some version or parallel of the Trinitarian distinctions between Father, Son, and Spirit be maintained? Explain why or why not.
	5. **Eschatology**: Should Christian theology conceive of history or the life of the world as heading toward a specific end? If so, what sort of end is it? What place, if any, does the doctrine of Providence hold in eschatology? What is the proper nature and content of Christian hope?

This paper must be submitted **by 2:00 pm on Saturday, November 21st**. No exceptions.

**COURSE CALENDAR**

*Note:* Students should complete each reading by the date under which it is listed.

**Week 1 (September 16) – Definitions, Sources and Tasks of Christian Theology**

* Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, "Introduction: Theology as Faith in Search of Understanding" in *Constructive Theology*, 1-19.
* Robert H. King "Introduction: The Task of Theology" in *Christian Theology*, 1-27.
* David Tracy, "Theological Method" in *Christian Theology*, 35-60.
* John McIntyre, "The Place of Imagination in Faith and Theology’- I & II. *The Expository Times*.
* Gordon Kaufman, "Theology as Imaginative Construction'. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Mar., 1982), pp. 73-79.

**Week 2 (September 23) - God and Revelation**

SHORT PAPER PRESENTATIONS BEGIN

* *Constructive Theology*, 19-76.
* Langdon Gilkey, "God," and George Stroup, "Revelation" in *Christian Theology*, 88-140.

**Week 3 (September 30) - Creation and Sin & Evil**

THEOLOGIAN PROFILE PRESENTATIONS BEGIN

* Julian N. Hart "Creation and Providence" in *Christian Theology*, 141-166.
* *Constructive Theology*, 117-160.
* Robert R. Williams "Sin and Evil" in *Christian Theology*, 194-221.

**Week 4 (October 7) - Theological Anthropology: Introductory Considerations**

* *Constructive Theology*, 77-97.
* David H. Kelsey, "Human Being" in *Christian Theology*, 167-193.
* Ian A. McFarland, *Difference and Identity*, 1-48.

**Week 5 (October 14) - Theological Anthropology: Embodiment and Abilities**

* Sally McFague, "Human Beings, Embodiment, and Our Home the Earth" in *Reconstructing Christian Theology*, 141-169.
* Brian Brock, "Introduction: Disability and the Quest for the Human" in *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 1-11 & 19-21.
* Dawn DeVries, "Creation, Handicappism, and The Community of Differing Abilities" in *Reconstructing Christian Theology*, 124-140.
* Deborah Beth Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology*. 93-120.

**Week 6 (October 21) - Theological Anthropology: Gender and Sexuality**

* Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 1-48.
* Kwok Piu-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 29-76
* Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love*, 1-42.

**Week 7 (October 28) - Theological Anthropology: Race and Ethnicity**

* *Constructive Theology*, 97-116.
* Michelle A. Gonzalez, "Who Is Americana/o?" in *Postcolonial Theologies*, 58-78.
* Namsoon Kang, "Who/What Is Asian?" in *Postcolonial Theologies*, 100-117.

**Week 8 (November 4) - Jesus Christ and Redemption**

* *Constructive Theology*, 161-200.
* Walter Lowe, "Christ and Salvation" in *Christian Theology*, 222-248.
* Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Christian Redemption between Colonialism and Pluralism" in *Reconstructing Christian Theology*, 269-302.

**Week 9 (November 11) - Church and Spirit**

* *Constructive Theology*, 201-278.
* Peter C. Hodgson and Robert C. Williams, "The Church" in *Christian Theology*, 249-273.
* David B. Burrell "The Spirit and the Christian Life" in *Christian Theology*, 302-327.

**Week 10 (November 18) - Eschatology and Christian Hope**

* Carl E. Braaten, "The Kingdom of God and Life Everlasting" in *Christian Theology*, 328-352.
* Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 97-124.