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Email to set up an appointment.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY - CT 549

Fall 2014

Course Description

All religious believers have a theology, whether it is unconscious, absorbed from others, or highly developed through years of experience. Even “seekers” and those who say they are “spiritual but not religious” have “ultimate concerns” which reflect deeply held commitments on which faith rests. Your theology is important because it both reflects and affects your behavior, your mental state, and your ability to love God, yourself, and others. A seminary education is a gift to help you articulate, refine and mature your theology. Ideally, your faith and actions will be enhanced in the process and doxology, or praise of God, will result. The goal of this course is to assist you in doing careful theological reflection, and prepare you to guide others in the same task. This is not only a class for future religious leaders, but also for those who simply want to explore faith issues, determine what they believe, and dig deeply in order to grow spiritual roots.

Goals and Objectives of the Course

- Gain a preliminary understanding of theology and its methods.
- Gain a basic ability to comprehend and define a foundational set of theological terms.
- Gain an entry-level knowledge of some core theological doctrines.
- Gain an overview of some other topics relevant to the study of theology.
- Reflect on the parameters of Christian theology.
- Improve your ability to engage in theological discussion.
- Work towards a measure of harmony and consistency in your beliefs.
- Reflect on the relationship of faith, practice, and belief.
- Articulate your current beliefs in a “Credo”

Expectations

A. ***Class attendance*** is essential if one is to fully benefit from the course. If you are ill, please let the instructor know about it (email me as soon as possible) and ask a fellow student for class notes. *If written material is due that day, please submit it on our Sakai site. Then you will be assured credit for that work.*

B. Active, informed participation is a goal. Students are expected to have read and reflected on the assignment for the day. Participation forms part of your grade. We represent a broad spectrum of beliefs in this class and you are invited to respectfully state your own views.

C. Take responsibility for achieving goals and objectives of the course. Students are expected to ask for clarification or elaboration when needed – *particularly during class time* -- so other students can benefit as well. Read the articles on Sakai under “resources” on writing research papers, definition of plagiarism and other helpful topics.

D. Complete each assignment on time. Late submissions will not be accepted. Turn in the written assignments to our Sakai site on or before the day they are due. If you must miss a class and yet you want to receive credit for the written work, submit the materials on our Sakai course site and on time.

E. Use inclusive language when referring to human beings in writing and speaking. Inclusive language for God, while encouraged, is not required, but students are expected to seriously consider the theological issues involved.

F. Use extra credit assignments if you have special interests or are intent on improving your grade.

Based on your interests, read something from the list “For Further Study.” If an entire book is listed and you are not able to read it all, then skim the introduction and conclusion, and chose 25-50 pages on which to focus. If you have chosen one of these as your book review assignment, you can present on it. Briefly explain the content to the class in a 15 minute presentation. Be careful to craft an engaging and informative presentation. Please notify the instructor at least a week in advance if you plan to take this opportunity.

CONTACTING THE INSTRUCTOR

Contact by email is preferable (Lmercadante@mtso.edu) although you may also telephone my office at any time (740-362-3442). Students may contact me at my home office *during business hours* if the matter is urgent (614-848-3455). Students are invited to make an appointment to discuss the course work any time this becomes necessary. This can be in-person or by phone.

Requirements

1. Reading and Participation: Daily reading assignments, prepare notes on reflection questions as basis for class discussion [not collected except as stated in #2], and active participation in class. [10%]

2. Learning to Handle Theological Difference – Peer Feedback

- a) Students will submit four of their reading reflections to the instructor on the days each topic is covered. **[9/17, 9/24, 10/1, 10/8]** Each draft must be submitted on Sakai before class starts on each day the topic is due. Full credit is given for completing the assignment and turning it in on time. This will be ungraded since the intent is to inspire peer interaction.
- b) You are free to edit these papers after the class and upon further reflection.
- c) By **Oct. 24**, you must email your four edited reflection papers to your dialogue partner.
- d) Your partner will read and comment on these papers (use the comment feature in Word). Bring your comments to class on Oct. 29 in paper or digital form so your partner can see them. Send the instructor a copy of your edited remarks before class, submitted in the appropriate section on Sakai.
- e) These papers will form the basis for class discussion on **Oct. 29**. Please follow the format listed towards the end of this syllabus. The goal of this assignment is two-fold: First, to help you learn how to dialogue with someone who may hold different theological views. Second, to move your forward toward creating your Credo.

3. “Follow Your Interests” Written Assignment:

Choose “a” or “b” or “c”

- a) **Book Review:** Prepare a 3-5 page review of one of the selections found on the list at the end of the syllabus. This should be at graduate school level, so please follow the format as specified. *Useful for someone with a particular interest served by one of these books. Good for someone not sure of their vocational direction and also for those very new to religion and/or theology.* [25%] **DUE Oct. 21**
- b) **Creeds Assignment:** Explore creeds, confessions, and systems of theology in two different Christian groups. Write a 3-5 page report (instructions below). *Very useful for someone with a “mixed” theological background, or little exposure to other traditions. Good for those going into ordained ministry who want to focus on ecumenical relations. Also useful for “seekers” looking for a denominational home.* [25%] **DUE Oct. 21**
- c) **Theology & film leadership [one leader]**
If you would like to do this assignment, **send the instructor an email by Sept. 1 including three suggestions for appropriate films.**

Graded student leadership for the one who opts for this instead of book review or creed assignment. See instructions below. [25%] Materials due to the instructor, posted on Sakai, by **Nov. 11.**

Useful for someone interested in youth ministry, adult education, or theology and culture.

4. Learning to use film to prompt theological discussion. Do all the reading listed on that day [including the articles posted on Sakai], view the film we choose and actively participate in class and/or group discussion. See further instructions further down in syllabus. **Film Day Nov. 12**

5. Quiz on full page of theological terms. [25%]

Quiz on Dec. 3. Given one time only. No make-up dates.

6. Write your “Credo” [40%] **DUE Dec. 10**

Here is where it all comes together. After exploring method, theological vocabulary, some basic doctrines, and the theology/culture relationship, you will be prompted to craft a statement of your faith. “Credo” means “I believe” and you will be writing a one page statement of your beliefs, along with up to ten additional pages of explanation. *This is a very profitable exercise for anyone, but especially helpful for those going into ministry since they will be required to articulate their faith stance. Further instructions below.*

Submitting Assignments

All written assignments must be submitted on our Sakai course website in the posted assignment slot. Do not submit your work in the “dropbox” or send by email because it won’t be recorded.

Policy on Extensions

In fairness to others, informal extensions cannot be given. Significant reductions in grade will be made for late work. In case of emergency, you may apply for a regular extension through the Registrar’s office.

TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Part I: Prolegomena

Purpose: To provide a preliminary understanding of theology and its methods.

THEOLOGY: ITS TASK, LIMITATIONS, SUBJECT MATTER, AND THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

8/27 Introduction to the course

- What is theology?
- The need for theology
- Our theological backgrounds
- Beginning work with theological terms
- Thinking about faith and film
- Choose partners for “Theological Difference” exercise

9/3 Sources and Norms in Theology

Read:

Stone and Duke, How to Think Theologically
 Migliore, Chap. 1 “The Task of Theology,” Chap. 2 “The Meaning of Revelation,” Chap. 3 “The Authority of Scripture”

🕒 **Reflection Questions:** *[To aid discussion, please prepare written reflections prior to class. These can be in draft form – they are meant to focus your reading and prepare you for discussion. They will not be collected but you may be asked to read from them in class.]*

1. What is theology, according to these books? In what ways have you already been doing theology?
2. What are the sources and norms of theology, according to these authors?
3. Write up a brief case study in one of the three areas covered in the Stone and Duke book (Gospel, Human Condition, Vocation), using the pattern developed in the book. Analyze your case following the authors’ method.

9/10 Sources and Norms in Theology

Read: Robert Kinast What Are They Saying About Theological Reflection?

Suggestion for Further Study :

- Soelle, pp. 7-41
- Placher, “Why Bother with Theology?” and Chap. 1 “How Do We Know What to Believe?”

🕒 **Reflection Questions for Kinast text:** *[To aid discussion, please prepare written reflections prior to class. These can be in draft form – they are meant to focus your reading and prepare you for discussion.]*

1. What is theological method and theological reflection, according to this book?

2. What does Kinast say are the three “common points of contact”?
3. What are the five types of reflection?
3. Which style of theological reflection accords most with your own practices? Explain.

Part II: Themes in Christian Theology

Purpose: To gain an entry-level knowledge of some core theological doctrines.

9/17 GOD

Read:

- Migliore, Chap. 4 “The Triune God,” part of Chap. 10 “The Holy Spirit and Christian Life,” pp. 223-235
- Placher, chap. 2, “What Do We Mean by ‘God’”, in Essentials of Christian Theology

Suggestion for Further Study :

- “The Ungiven God,” chap. 3 in James Evans, Jr., We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology
- Soelle, pp. 183-195
- Leonardo Boff, chap. 4 “Trinity,” in Sobrino, Systematic Theology, pp. 75-89
- Kelton Cobb, The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture, chapter 5 “Images of God” pp.135-176

🕒 **Reflection #1 Questions:** Reflect on all the questions at the end of the chapter (pp.91-2) in the Placher book. Choose 4 to answer. Then in a few paragraphs, explain your doctrine of God.

Submit to the instructor before class today on our Sakai assignment section. Bring to class to aid your participation. You may edit these papers upon further reflection, before turning them in to your student partner no later than Oct. 24.

Required as one of your four “Learning to Handle Theological Difference” student review papers.

Terms Work Session:

Come to class prepared to discuss, with a group of fellow students, a preliminary one paragraph definition that you have written for each term in column one.

9/24 CHRIST

Read:

- Migliore, Chap. 8 “The Person and Work of Jesus Christ,” (pp. 163-196); Chap. 14 “Christian Hope,” (330-353)
- Placher, chap. 5 “How Does Jesus Christ Make a Difference?” in Essentials of Christian Theology

Suggestion for Further Study :

- Soelle, pp. 102-135
- Evans, We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology, pp. 77-83, 92-98
- Cobb, Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture, chap. 8 “Salvation” pp.229-261

🕒 **Reflection #2 Questions:** [Prepare these to aid your class participation.] Reflect on all the questions at the end of the Placher chapter (p.219). Choose 4 to answer. Then in a few paragraphs, explain your doctrine of Christ. If you do not consider yourself a Christian, explain your understanding of your key religious role model, savior figure, or human exemplar of divinity.

Submit to the instructor before class today on our Sakai assignment section. Bring to class to aid your participation. You may edit these papers upon further reflection, before turning them in to your student partner no later than Oct. 24.

Required as one of your four “Learning to Handle Theological Difference” student review papers.

10/1 HUMANITY, NEW CREATION, SUFFERING AND EVIL

Read:

- Migliore, Chap. 6 “The Providence of God and the Mystery of Evil,” (pp. 117-138); Chap. 7 “Humanity as Creature, Sinner, and New Being in Christ,” (139-62); part of Chap. 10 “The Christian Life,” (235-247).
- Placher, chap. 4, “What’s Wrong With Us?”, in Essentials of Christian Theology

[We will have a guest lecturer today, The Rev. Dr. John Hart]

Suggestion for Further Study

- Mercadante, “Anguish: Unraveling Sin and Victimization” [on Sakai]
- Soelle, pp. 54-67, 77-94
- Evans, pp. 107-117, “On Being Black”
- Faus, “Sin”, pp. 194-204, in Sobrino

- Cobb, Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture, chap. 6 “Human Nature” pp.177-210
- Cobb, Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture, chap. 7 “Sin” pp.211-228

🕒 **Reflection #3 Questions:** [Prepare these to aid your class participation.]
 Reflect on all the questions on pp.180. Prepare #'s 3, 6, and 7 using information you learned from both books.

Then answer these: What is sin? Where do you start your analysis of human being, e.g., with sin, with image of God, with ontology? If you had one sermon to preach on “theological anthropology” what would be your first sentence? Then, in a few brief paragraphs, explain your doctrine of theological anthropology (human being).

Submit to the instructor before class today on our Sakai assignment section. Bring to class to aid your participation. You may edit these papers upon further reflection, before turning them in to your student partner no later than Oct. 24.

Required as one of your four “Learning to Handle Theological Difference” student review papers.

10/8 The Church

Read:

- Migliore, Chap. 11 “The New Community,” (pp. 248-300)
- Placher, chap. 6 “Why Bother With the Church?”, in Essentials of Christian Theology

Suggestion for Further Study:

- Soelle, pp. 136-153
- Evans, pp.134-140
- Magana, “Ecclesiology in the Theology of Liberation, in Sobrino, pp. 184-93
- Cobb, Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture, chap. 9, “Life Everlasting” pp.262-290

🕒 **Reflection #4 Questions:** [Write prior to class.]

Reflect on all questions at the end of the Placher chapter (pp.254-5). Choose 4 to answer in writing. Then in a few brief paragraphs, explain your doctrine of the church. If you do not consider yourself a Christian, then how does the relationship of community and divinity function, in your understanding?

Submit to the instructor before class today on our Sakai assignment section. Bring to class to aid your participation. You may edit these papers upon further reflection, before turning them in to your student partner no later than Oct. 24.

Required as one of your four “Learning to Handle Theological Difference” student review papers.

Terms Work Session:

Come to class prepared to discuss, with a group of fellow students, a one paragraph definition that you have written for each term in column two.

Note Well:

For the next class, bring in your completed book review(s) or denominational report for class discussion. Submit, also, to the instructor on our Sakai site under the proper posted topic.

RECESS – No Class 10/15

10/22 STUDENT INTEREST GROUPS

“Follow Your Interest” Report Due Today [graded].

Be prepared to discuss your work with others in the class. Student groups will be formed to discuss books reviewed or denominational groups studied. Prepare a short set of notes or a statement in case you are called upon to speak before the class.

Please follow instructions at the end of the syllabus for written reports.

Purpose of assignment:

- *To broaden your exposure to theological themes and groups while allowing you to pursue a particular interest or perspective.*
- *To gain experience in reading and interpreting theological texts.*
- *To learn about other Christian belief system and, help you articulate your beliefs.*

Assignment for Next Week – Learning to Handle Theological Difference

By Oct. 24 email -- in Word -- your four written assignments to your partner. Your job will be to read the other student’s work and make comments, using the Word comment feature. Post a copy of your editing work in the proper slot in Sakai “assignments” [not “dropbox”] for the instructor. You are expected to make at least five to ten comments per paper. And then answer the questions

posed later in the syllabus. Focus on theology rather than editing. Then come to class ready to discuss. We will practice evaluating and helping to improve theological thinking in a constructive, kindly, but cogent and rational manner. **See instructions at end of syllabus.**

Important: Although no grades will be given on these sheets, your participation is still required. Thus, preparing these reflections, getting reviewed, and reviewing others sheets make up part of your class participation grade. This assignment will also help ready you to write your Credo.

10/29 Learning to Handle Theological Difference Day

You will get the chance to discuss your four written reflections with your partner and, if time, also with another student. You may also be called upon to read them to the larger class.

Part III: Theology and Culture

Purpose: To introduce you to other themes, topics, and perspectives in Christian theology, relevant in contemporary culture.

11/5 Why theology and culture?

ALL READ:

- Kelton Cobb, The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture, chap. 3 "Theology and Culture" [pp.72-100] and chap. 4 "Theological Tools" [pp.101-132] [On library reserve or purchase]

A. LIBERATION THEOLOGIES

All Read:

- Migliore, pp.197-222

Suggestions for Further Study:

Latin American

- Boff, pp. 1-21, in Sobrino,
- Boff and Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology

Feminist

- Soelle, pp. 68-76
- Chopp and Taylor, pp. 25-48.

African-American

- Evans, Introduction, pp. 1-10
- Chopp and Taylor, 170-194.

- “Religious Meetings in de Bushes,” chap. 1 in Dwight Hopkins, Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology

Asian

- Andrew Sung Park, The Wounded Heart of God
- Jung Young Lee, Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology

🕒 **Reflection Questions:** [Write prior to class.]

What are the similarities and differences among the various types of liberation theology mentioned in the readings? Explain these theologies in light of your understanding of the gospel.

B. World Religions -- Read:

- Migliore, Chap. 13 “The Finality of Jesus Christ and World Religions” (pp.301-329)
- Placher, chap. 8 “What About *Them*”, in Essentials of Christian Theology

🕒 **Reflection Questions:**

What are the essential theological elements in the debate over world religions? What is at stake? How do you reconcile belief in Jesus Christ and the recognition that there are other significant religions in the world?

11/12 Reading Theology in Culture

A. Addiction -- Read:

- Linda Mercadante, “Sin, Addiction, and Freedom,” in Chopp and Taylor, Reconstructing Christian Theology [on Sakai and library reserve]

🕒 **Reflection Questions:**

What is your experience and/or assessment of the addiction recovery movement? What is its relationship to the contemporary church? Do you think the concept addiction could usefully replace or supplement the concept sin? Does the church have a “therapeutic” role?

B. Film Project

All Read:

- Robert K. Johnston, “Theological Approaches” [on Sakai]
- Clive Marsh, “Audience Reception” [on Sakai]

For Further Information:

- Stone, “Modern Protestant Approaches to Film” [on Sakai]
- Clarke and Fiddes, eds., Flickering Images: Theology and Film in Dialogue, chaps. 2-5 pp.7-79

Learning to Read the Culture: Practicing with Film

Designated leader will guide the class in discussing the selected film. The students will then give feed-back to the instructor and leader through an evaluation form. The goal is to discern the “ultimate concerns” of the main characters and plot-lines and to reflect theologically on them. Leader should review the film texts listed on our syllabus (or other reputable texts on theology and film) in order to guide students in careful attention to the film, its techniques, plot-lines, acting, special effects, etc., before moving on to theological reflection. See section below on film for additional ideas.

11/19

A. Theology of the Earth

Read:

- Migliore, Chap. 5 “The Good Creation,” (pp. 92-116)

Activity: View the documentary “Chasing Ice,” which is available online. Come prepared to talk with the class about interpreting climate instability in a theological framework. Try such interpretive frames as evil, addiction, world religion, etc. Use the Migliore reading to help you think theologically about stewardship of the earth. We will have a guest lecturer today, The Rev. Dr. Bill Casto.

Suggestions for Further Study:

- Elizabeth A. Johnson, Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love

B. Terms Work Session:

Come to class prepared to discuss, with a group of fellow students, a one paragraph definition that you have written for each term in column three.

11/26 No Class. Thanksgiving recess.

12/3 1. Terms Quiz on All Terms

2. Credo Work Session

Bring in three copies of a rough draft of your one page credo. Instructor and students will help each other think through and improve these statements.

12/10 Credo Paper Due

Instructions for Assignments

For Film Leader

1. Film is to be chosen with class in-put. Criteria rest primarily on the film's depth and suitability for theological critique and discussion. View and evaluate it.
 2. Do all the readings listed for that day.
 3. See (or re-see) the film and take careful notes during viewings. You may want to view your chosen film right away, and then again after studying more theology.
 4. Review some of the major themes in Christian theology. Then watch the film and decide which theological theme(s) (doctrines, concepts) may be especially relevant. Let this theme (or themes) set an agenda for your analysis of the film. But be careful not to stretch the theological terms to make them fit. Do not decide ahead which theme you will apply to the film. And don't feel compelled to "baptize" a film which does not pretend or intend to be "Christian."
 5. Try to determine the theological perspective of the film-maker, if possible and if any. Then describe the perspective of the main character(s). These points of view may be radically different or identical.
 6. Does this film speak to a longing, hope, anxiety, feeling of disquiet, or gap in our culture? What do you, as a religious person, say to this?
 7. Decide which approach you will take (e.g., apologetic, critique of content from within Christian perspective, ethical critique, dialogue between different perspectives, etc.) Use inclusive language.
 - a) Prepare a short statement of your theological analysis (1-2 pgs). Let this be a coherent, organized brief critique of the film. Don't rehash the plot or quote lots of dialogue. Stress the theological points.
 - b) Use a laptop computer with DVD player and practice beforehand. Nothing is so distracting as fumbling and unfamiliarity with clips. Use relevant *short* clips to illustrate your points.
 - c) Propose several thought-provoking questions to the group and lead discussion.
 - d) Create and give a short evaluative survey to the group. Ask them to comment and rate your presentation, hand-out, analysis, and leadership. This will form the basis of your grade for this project, so make the evaluation detailed enough to provide sufficient feedback. Ask group members to assign a grade to you.
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For Book Reviews

1. Choose one of the items on list the below and read carefully:
 - Daniel Migliore. The Power of God and the gods of Power.

- Douglas John Hall. Why Christian?: For Those on the Edge of Faith and Part A “The What of Theology” in Omerod Introducing Contemporary Theologies,
- C.S. Song. Tracing the Footsteps of God: Discovering What You Really Believe and Brian S. Rosner. The Consolations of Theology
- Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury. Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief and Brian S. Rosner The Consolations of Theology
- George and McGrath, eds. For All the Saints: Evangelical Theology and Christian Spirituality
- Anthony Flew. There is *No* A God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind
- Cooper and McClure Claiming Theology in the Pulpit and Part A “The What of Theology” in Omerod Introducing Contemporary Theologies,
- Dwight N. Hopkins, Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology
- Val Webb Why We’re Equal: Introducing Feminist Theology
- Neil Omerod, Introducing Contemporary Theologies
- Don Luck, Why Study Theology and Brian S. Rosner. The Consolations of Theology
- **Newly added to book review list:**
 - Elizabeth A. Johnson, Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love
 - James K.A. Smith, How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor
 - Linda Mercadante, Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious
 - Jung Young Lee, Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology
- *Note: While these new additions are not on the Abingdon book list for this course, all are easily and quickly obtained as an ebook or through Amazon or other book sites.*

2. Review your book selection(s) in 3-5 double-spaced pages [12 pt type, normal margins], including foot or end-notes.

Remember that in being brief, you must also show more quickly and concisely that you have understood the material. Don’t use short space as an excuse for superficiality but instead as a goad to mastery. This will be a major predictor of your grade.

3. Demonstrate that you have absorbed the material by using the following format with each section titled as shown in bold.
 - a. **Premise of the Book(s):** Describe the basic premise of the book(s), how

- the editor or author(s) proceeds, what is covered (1-2 pages).
- b. **Strengths and Weaknesses:** Analyze the strengths of the arguments and information presented. How does it advance the arguments it takes on? Then describe the weaknesses of the approach or how it fails to fulfill its initial promise. (1-2 pages) If applicable, compare and contrast the two works.
 - c. **Theological Analysis and Impact:** In your opinion, what are the underlying theological themes and intent of these readings? In what ways has this thesis (theses), these arguments, examples and illustrative material made an impact on your own faith and belief system? (1-2 pages)

For Creeds Assignment

Explanation of Assignment:

Exploring the beliefs of others can help us clarify our own. We learn much by studying the historical and contemporary creeds of mainstream Christian denominations and those from our own heritage. Doing this helps you hone your research skills and will help later in the writing of your “Credo.” It is especially helpful to see how beliefs interact with each other.

Preliminary Research

- Choose two creeds or confessions from two different recognized (World Council of Churches) Christian groups. **Do not choose a creed which is common to all or most Christian groups, e.g. The Nicene Creed or The Apostles’ Creed.**
- One of these creeds or confessions may be from your own heritage or current denomination or group.
- Choose a key doctrine to compare in both.
- Be sure that each creed covers some of the same theological concepts, especially such things as doctrines of God, Christ, Church (can include such things as sacraments, ministry, polity), Scripture, Eschatology, etc.
- Find out:
 - The official name of each group you chose; a brief overview of their historical background and major figure(s); some of the most important beliefs of each group; copy some short excerpts from each creed seem most important to you and why [limit these to several paragraphs per group].
- Now that you have made your choices and done some background research, what is your preliminary theological analysis and comparison of these groups’ beliefs?

Where to Find Creeds:

Consult the library catalog and search for reference material or books on “creeds and confessions of the church.” You may also use the internet, but be very careful that these creeds are from a historical, recognized denomination (member of World Council of Churches), rather than a small sectarian or “fringe” group with limited history and membership. Be careful that these are not just arbitrary and time-limited statements, but have the full backing of the denomination.

Wikipedia will not be accepted as a primary source. Although internet research can form *part of your work*, do not use small, splinter groups found on the internet. Choices should include large, internationally recognized Christian denominations [World Council of Churches] with a history of theological thinking. A reputable library and texts in hard copy can help you determine which groups fit the above criteria. Consult our librarians when in doubt.

Appropriate choices would include such denominations as AME, United Methodist, various Presbyterian denominations (such as USA, Reformed, Orthodox), Episcopal, main Lutheran groups, various Baptist groups, Assemblies of God, Disciples of Christ, Mennonite, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox groups, etc. If your own heritage includes a smaller or sectarian group, please feel free to include that. For instance, if you have come from a Salvation Army, Unity, Quaker, Unitarian Universalist, Seventh Day Adventist, or other group, see if you can discover a creed, confession or statement of faith from that.

How Do I Choose?

- A Presbyterian from the PC (USA) may choose to explore documents from The Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and one other Reformed group, comparing them to her own. That student could also check out, for examples, Calvin’s *Institutes*, and read several sections. Another Presbyterian student might choose to explore Episcopal, Catholic, or Orthodox expressions of faith, as well as the Reformed.
- A United Methodist could discover several of Wesley’s sermons, for example, and read through them. This student would also explore Wesleyan expressions of faith and then choose, for example, to explore other Episcopal forms (such as AME) or compare Reformed or Pentecostal forms of belief with the Wesleyan expressions.
- A member of an independent church, or a seeker with no affiliation, can choose creeds from his or her heritage, ethnic background, or groups to which they feel especially curious, attracted or repelled.

- In any case, be sure to consider what each group believes about the key doctrines we have covered [God, Christ, Humanity, and Church].
- Discover how they also view such concepts as eschatology, teleology, authority of Scripture, etc.

The Written Report

1. Write up a 3-5 page evaluation of your findings, double-spaced, 12 pt type, and normal margins, including foot or end-notes.
2. You can attach creeds or excerpts as an addendum, but do not extensively quote them in your paper, although salient brief quotes can go in foot or end notes.
3. The paper must contain a *brief* explanation of the following items, identified with subheads in your paper:
 - **Distinctives:** What makes each group distinct? What are they known for in particular (briefly)?
 - **Key Historical Elements and Leaders:** What are the most important aspects of each group's history and/or key figures?
 - **Core Beliefs:** What are the core beliefs and how did the key historical elements and leaders influence them?
 - **Theological Comparison:** Compare the two groups, *especially focusing on a particular doctrine or belief*, or related set of doctrines or beliefs. [You could, for example, choose to focus on the issue of authority of Scripture in all three groups]
 - **Belief and Practice:** How do you think their beliefs affected their practice? Briefly discuss.

Learning to Handle Theological Difference Day

- a) You will be assigned a partner ahead of time. Email to your partner your four papers in Word and also submit to instructor via Sakai.
- b) Spend time reflecting on your partner's papers, focusing on theology. Using the "comments" aspect of Word, include at least five to ten comments and/or questions per paper, attaching them to the text where they pertain. You can make editorial comments about writing, but the primary focus is theological.
- c) Then prepare concluding comments by answering the four questions below. Put this at the end of their paper.
- d) Email your work back to them before class, and print out or bring in a digital copy of what you have done. This is to permit us to be prepared to have a

working session to help each other clarify our theological thinking and writing.

Each student will take prepare comments on *each* of the four papers, using the following format.

1. My sense of your overall theological thesis is this: [explain in one or more sentences]
2. The strengths of your theological thinking are these aspects: [be specific especially about doctrinal issues]
3. I need more clarification on the following aspects of your paper: [explain what you do not understand and what you would like the student to speak on further]
4. Here are some ways I think ways you can improve your theological articulation, using Scripture, tradition, reason and experience: [you can use references here from our texts or other credible resources]

Purpose of this assignment:

- To learn how to have theological conversations that are open-minded but logical and rational, using Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.
- To learn how to constructively, kindly, and helpfully improve each other's articulation of their own beliefs.
- To learn how to handle theological differences respectfully, but still expecting a high level of cogency and consistency.
- Not to “convert” other people to our way of thinking or convince them that their views are wrong, but to share theological options so they may correct and improve themselves.
- To help fellow believers refine, clarify and better express their beliefs.

For Credo Paper

Write a one-page comprehensive statement of faith, including all the major doctrines covered in class. This must not be any standardized formula (whether denominational or liturgical), but must be *your own* expression. Explicate and elaborate on this statement in a following essay. (Total of 10 pages *maximum*).

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. The following doctrines must be included:
Revelation, Scripture, God, Christ (Person and Work), Human Being (including sin, grace, gender, justification, sanctification), Church (including sacraments, ministry, mission), Eschatology. You must explain your epistemology, as well as the sources and norms for your Credo. This is essential.

2. The doctrines in your Credo should cohere together in some kind of harmonious, systematic way (at the least, they should not be mutually incompatible).

3. You are expected to be aware, research, and express knowledge that there are varying ways to express the basic doctrines. You must show some evidence of having considered these before arriving at your own views. Simple “fideism” will not garner any special credit. You are meant to arrive at an intellectually sound expression of your faith.

4. You are invited to treat the doctrines from your own faith perspective, not according to some prescribed formula. However, it is expected that you be informed by your theological/denominational heritage, if you have one, or find some compatible faith traditions to learn from, if you do not have a religious/faith background. If you reject aspects of your own tradition, explain why.

-This may result in an unconventional order, minimization of some doctrines and heightening of others, inclusion of some topics in more than one place, etc. That is fine, as long as you explain your reasoning.

- It is crucial that you examine different orderings and treatments in books of systematic theology (library has large selection) in order to help with this task. Look, also, at books of creeds and confessions (historical and contemporary) and examine mainstream denominational websites.

-The explication should make clear that you have considered a number of options for each doctrine, and give reasons for your choice of interpretation.

Paper should begin with a one-page concise statement of faith (e.g. "I believe in one God...").

- 1) Begin with the doctrine or concept you feel is most important.
- 2) Proceed, then, in priority order, and in logical order.

4. Remainder of paper will elaborate on the one-page statement. Be sure to clearly explicate each item that you have treated in your concise statement of faith.

Required Resources

You must show evidence of using at least five (5) outside sources as references for this project. Class readings do not count as outside sources. The Bible, *although its use is encouraged, does not count*

as an outside resource. The Book of Discipline and other denominational works are good resources, but *they will not count as outside research* works. Instead, look for systematic and topical theological works. All work consulted must be foot- or end-noted and listed in your bibliography.

-Consider such sources as theological dictionaries, systematic theologies written by key figures in your own tradition, or traditions which you believe are an improvement on or supplement to your own, works on single doctrines, on confessional statements, on historical creedal statements and confessions, etc.

-Make it clear that you have considered these approaches but are integrating them reflectively or critically, rather than dogmatically, within your own understandings of the faith.

THEOLOGICAL TERMS

eschatology	charismatic	revelation
incarnation	hermeneutics	sanctification
sola scriptura	imago Dei	fides quaerens intellectum
apocalyptic	ecclesiology	orthodoxy
heresy	providence	theological anthropology
atonement	Christology	transcendence/immanence
soteriology	predestination	teleology
grace	gospel	canon
tradition	dogmatics (dogma)	analogy
apologetics	apocatastasis	natural theology
concupiscence	transubstantiation	theodicy
subordinationism	pantheism/panentheism	simul justus et peccator
sacrament	prolegomena	anthropomorphism
apostolicity	catholic	creatio ex nihilo
deism	ekklesia/ecclesia	election
epistemology	ex opere operato	omniscience
omnipotence	monism	millennialism
logos	koinonia	kerygma

inspiration	impassibility	holy
fundamentalism	secularism	vocation
original sin	adiaphora	credo ut intelligam
confession	docetism	Arianism
covenant	forensic	Protestant principle
piety	monasticism	asceticism
Gnosticism	ecumenical	Trinity
Doctrine	communicatio idiomatum	via negativa

Important Standard Policies for Your Work at MTSO

Please see Student Handbook for sections providing policy details on the following:

ADA—MTSO seeks to remove barriers to inclusion in its learning communities. Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs at the beginning of the semester. Please contact the Director of Student Services to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Any accommodation must be agreed upon prior to the due date of the affected course requirement.

Class attendance—Regular attendance is expected in all classes. During unavoidable absences, students are responsible for missed work. An excessive number of absences may result in grade reduction or course failure, despite successful completion of all assigned work. In most cases, a student will not be allowed credit for a course if he or she is absent for 25% of the class sessions. As it relates to blended courses, students may not be allowed credit if they are absent for 25% of class meetings or if 25% of online course work is not completed. Use of Skype or similar technology is not a substitute for attendance in class.

Electronic Devices—Turn mobile devices off or “vibrate only” during class. Browsing the Internet or engaging in email or social network conversations during class is discouraged. Instructors have the right to impose grading penalties for disruptions due to electronic devices.

Human Subjects Research—Research by MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel that collects non-public information from and/or about living individuals or contemporary organizations/groups for purposes of publication or public presentation (including class assignments) must be approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee. MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel should err on the side of caution and apply for committee approval of any activity that may fit this description.

Inclusive Language—In accordance with MTSO’s policy on inclusive language, all students are expected to use gender inclusive or gender neutral language in their writing and in the classroom discussions when referring to human beings.

Incompletes—To receive a course grade of Incomplete, students must submit the petition form from the Registrar with all signatures to the Dean’s Office before the last day of regularly scheduled classes. See Student Handbook for intensive term deadlines. Any petition submitted without a due date for outstanding work will be denied. If work is not complete by the due date the Registrar will record the grade of F for the course.

Pass/Fail—The decision to exercise this option must be made before the end of the second week of the course by completing the appropriate form available through the Registrar. To receive a grade of "pass" the student must do at least the equivalent of C minus work in the course.

Plagiarism—Plagiarism is a serious matter of academic, professional, and personal integrity. All students at the masters level are expected to understand the requirement to provide attribution when the work of others is used. Students are also expected to be familiar with and understand the school’s policy on Academic Misconduct found in the Student Handbook. If students have questions about attribution, citation, and how to avoid plagiarism they should consult the course instructor, the school’s writing instructor, or library staff. When in doubt it is better to provide attribution even if one is uncertain about the proper citation form. Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct that results in disciplinary actions per the Student Handbook that may range from failing an assignment or course to expulsion. Updated 8/13/14

FINDING RESOURCES

The lists below are simply a starter for your research. Many of these will be on our reserve shelf in the library so *please check there first!!* There are abundant resources for theology in our library. **If you are confused, overwhelmed, or curious, chances are you will be able to find something to help you in our library. These resources are superior to what you might find in a random search on the internet and will be a more efficient use of your time.**

Texts

Robert Kinast, What Are They Saying About Theological Reflection?

Linda Mercadante “Anguish: Unraveling Sin and Victimization” in The Anglican Theological Review, Spring 2001

Daniel L. Migliore Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology

William Placher Essentials of Christian Theology (WJKP 2003)

Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke How to Think Theologically

Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology

Additional Resources

Culture, Race, Gender, Liberation, Ecology

-Cobb, Kelton. The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture

-Boff, Leonardo and Clodovis. Introducing Liberation Theology

- Evans, Jr., James H. We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology

- Hopkins, Dwight N. Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology

-Sobrinho, Jon and Ignacio Ellacuria, eds. Systematic Theology: Perspectives from

Liberation Theology

- Vanhoozer, Kevin; Anderson, Charles and Slesman, Michael, eds. Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends
- Val Webb Why We're Equal: Introducing Feminist Theology
- Elizabeth A. Johnson, Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love
- James K.A. Smith, How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor

Contemporary Belief and Method

- Chopp, Rebecca and Mark Kline Taylor, Reconstructing Christian Theology
- Hall, Douglas John. Why Christian?: For Those on the Edge of Faith
- Hodgson, Peter, and Robert King, Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks
- Donald Luck, Why Study Theology?
- Migliore, Daniel. The Power of God and the gods of Power
- Omerod Introducing Contemporary Theologies
- Rosner, B. The Consolations of Theology
- Sauter Gateways to Dogmatics
- Dorothee Soelle Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology
- Song, C.S. Tracing the Footsteps of God: Discovering What You Really Believe
- Williams, Rowan, Archbishop and Wendy Beckett. Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief
- Linda Mercadante, Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious

Specific Application

- Cooper and McClure Claiming Theology in the Pulpit
- Flew, Anthony. There is 'no' A God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind
- George and McGrath, eds. For All the Saints: Evangelical Theology and Christian Spirituality
- Clive Marsh. Theology Goes to the Movies: An Introduction to Critical Christian Thinking
- Linda Mercadante "The Spiritual Geography of Newark, New Jersey" in Tanner, Spirit in the Cities
- Linda Mercadante "Sin, Addiction and Freedom," in Chopp and Taylor, Reconstructing Christian Theology
- Linda Mercadante, Victims & Sinners: Spiritual Roots of Addiction and Recovery

Reference Works

- Booth, Wayne, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams. The Craft of Research
- Kelly James Clark, Richard Lints, James K.A. Smith 101 Key Terms in Philosophy and Their Importance for Theology
- Gonzalez, J & C. Heretics for Armchair Theologians
- Harvey, Van. A Handbook of Theological Terms

- H. Wayne House, Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine
- Jacobsen, Rolf, ed. Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffey Dictionary of Theological Terms
- Lipson, Charles. Doing Honest Work in College
- Stewart The Literature of Theology

Additional Resources

- Allen, Ronald. Thinking Theologically: The Preacher as Theologian
- Clarke, Anthony and Fiddes, Paul, eds. Flickering Images: Theology and Film in Dialogue
- Harries, Richard. God Outside the Box: Why Spiritual People Object to Christianity
- McAvoy Kitchen Talk: Sharing Our Faith Stories
- Margaret R. Miles Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies
- Sarah Vaux. Finding Meaning at the Movies
- Paul M. Zahl. Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life