

REL 435: Contemporary Christian Thought

Manchester College, Fall 2009

Tue/Thurs. 9:30-10:45 am

Instructor: Kate Eisenbise

Contact Info: Email: KSEisenbise@manchester.edu

Phone: (260) 982-5348

Office: Ad Bldg. 201

Office Hours:

Course Description

This course examines the major theological movements of the late 20th and early 21st centuries through the writings of several prominent thinkers. We will pay special attention to how these movements react to the world around them as well as how they engage and build upon one another. Class sessions will usually follow a seminar format and will be guided by student discussion.

Course Objectives

Upon completing this course, students will be able to

- Identify trends in contemporary Christian thought and make connections between them.
- Situate leading theologians and their ideas within their historical, social, and theological contexts.
- Read critically and analyze difficult texts in order to evaluate an author's claims and argument.
- Critique one work of constructive theology in its entirety through proficient academic writing.
- Consider complex issues such as class, race, gender, and globalization as criteria for challenging Christianity's traditional tenets.
- Contribute to class discussions where their own ideas and classmates' ideas will be respectfully engaged and challenged.

Requirements

- Regular class attendance and active class participation. The success of this course is dependent upon the students' engagement of the texts. Read the assignments before coming to class, noting where you agree or disagree with the author or where you have questions. Prepare at least one comment or question generated by the reading. Submit this comment/question via ANGEL at least one hour before the beginning of class. These comments/questions will often be our starting point for class discussion.

In order to ensure regular attendance, missing more than four class sessions will result in the lowering of your final grade by two percentage points for every additional absence. Except in extreme cases (such as hospitalization), no distinction will be made between excused and unexcused absences. However, if you know you will be absent from class, please let me know.

The participation grade will be based on your performance in three areas: listening, quality of contributions, and frequency of participation. You will receive 0-2 points in each area (according to the rubric below) for each day of class. (20% of grade)

Listening

- 2 = actively supports, engages, and listens to peers; comments reflect attention to the comments of others
- 1 = comments reflect some inattentiveness to the comments of others
- 0 = comments unrelated to the comments of others or irrelevant to the discussion; interrupts others or disparages their comments

Quality of Contributions

- 2 = makes relevant comments based on assigned reading; demonstrates thorough participation
- 1 = does not offer to contribute to discussion but contributes to a moderate degree when called on; demonstrates adequate preparation
- 0 = tries to respond when called on but comments reflect inadequate preparation and little understanding of the material or previous remarks

Frequency of Comments

- 2 = actively participates and is engaged in the discussion
- 1 = demonstrates sporadic involvement
- 0 = seldom participates or is generally disengaged

- Careful reading of one whole text from the supplementary bibliography and chapter outlines. (See the Final Paper Guidelines for more explanation.) (20% of grade)
- Rough Draft of Final Paper. (See Final Paper Guidelines for more explanation.) **Due Tuesday, November 24**. (20% of grade)
- 8-10 page paper on the book of your choice from the supplementary bibliography. (See Final Paper Guidelines for more explanation.) **Due December 10**. (40% of grade)

Suggestions

- Student Conference. There will be no class on Tuesday, November 17 to give you time for reading and writing. I will be available that day for individual meetings to help you work through strategies for organizing and writing your final paper. I highly recommend you take advantage of this time as it will most likely save you time and headaches when it comes time to preparing your final paper draft.
- Take advantage of the assistance provided by the Writing Center, and ask others to read (and proofread) your work.

Course Policies

Because class participation is such an integral component to this course, disruptive or disrespectful speech or behavior that intimidates others will not be tolerated. One warning will be issued in private conversation; then students may be dismissed from the course for such behavior.

Late work will be accepted, but missing the deadline will result in a lower grade. All late chapter outlines will receive a ✓-, and the grade on the final paper will be lowered by a full letter grade for every two days the paper is overdue.

All incidences of plagiarism will be handled according to the policies and procedures outlined in “The MC Source,” pp. 8-9. Please note that plagiarism occurs whenever you claim credit for ideas and work that are not your own, including failing to cite outside sources, quoting another’s words without using quotation marks, and/or failing to correctly paraphrase an author’s argument in your own words. For more information, consult the MLA Style Handbook. When in doubt, please ask!

Manchester College, in compliance with federal guidelines, is committed to providing students with disabilities access to programs and activities that are equal to the access provided to students without disabilities. If you believe that you need an accommodation due to a disability, please contact Bonnie O’Connell, the director of services for students with disabilities (Success Center, second floor of the Union); please telephone 982-5076 to schedule an appointment.

Grading

I will use the following guidelines for grading the final papers. Please note that papers will be graded on both content and writing style (good sentence structure, correct grammar and punctuation).

- An **A paper** is exemplary and creative, going beyond the minimal requirements of the assignment. This paper offers an in-depth, insightful, and original analysis of the primary text, demonstrates clear understanding of the author’s thesis, argument, and/or methodology, and skillfully integrates the student’s own perspective and critique. It also displays clear and forceful writing with no grammatical errors.
- A **B paper** competently fulfills the requirements of the assignment but without unusual distinction. It shows adequate understanding of the primary text and offers some original analysis. It is clearly written and grammatically correct.
- A **C paper** fulfills some of the requirements of the assignment. It offers minimal original analysis of the primary text and relies instead on the student’s unsubstantiated opinions (without adequate support or evidence). This paper displays unclear and/or grammatically unsound writing.
- A **D paper** fulfills few of the requirements. It reiterates one or two facts from the primary text but does not demonstrate understanding of the text or offer any original analysis or interpretation. Its writing is unclear, hard to follow, and contains multiple grammatical errors.
- An **F paper** fails to address any of the requirements of the assignment. It demonstrates ignorance of the primary text and contains such poor writing as to be fairly incomprehensible.

Required Texts

- Course Reader (available in the bookstore). All assigned readings for the course can be found in the reader.
- Book of your choice from the supplementary bibliography

Class Schedule

Date	Class Topic	Assignment
------	-------------	------------

Introductions/Overview		
Thursday, Sept. 3	Introductions, Syllabus	Boff, “Sermon from the Mount of Corcovado”
Tuesday, Sept. 8	Overview of 20 th Century Theology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elizondo, “Emergence of the New World Church” • Schreier, “The Impact of Vatican II”

Latin American Liberation Theology		
Thursday Sept. 10	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smith, “Liberation Theology,” pp. 203-209 • Hennelly, “Latin American Liberation Theology,” pp. 13-26 • Gutiérrez, pp. 3-12 • Final Paper Topic Due
Tuesday, Sept 15	Gustavo Gutiérrez, <i>A Theology of Liberation</i>	Gutiérrez, pp. 81-105
Thursday, Sept. 17		Gutiérrez, pp. 106-20, 141-48
Tuesday, Sept. 22		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gutiérrez, pp. 148-65, 174 • Chapter Outline due
Thursday, Sept. 24		

Black Theology		
Tuesday, Sept. 29	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hennelley, “Black Theology of Liberation,” pp. 19-102 • Cone, pp. 1-20
Thursday, Oct. 1	James Cone, <i>A Black Theology of Liberation</i>	Cone, pp. 21-39
Tuesday, Oct. 6		Cone, pp. 63-81, 119-28

Thursday, Oct. 8	Jeremiah Wright: Bill Moyers' Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcript of Wright's sermon (to be distributed in class) • Chapter Outline due
------------------	-----------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Feminist/Womanist/Mujerista Theologies		
Thursday, Oct. 15	Feminist Theology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Johnson, "The Maleness of Christ" • Ruether, <i>Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism</i>, 69-80, 95-107
Tuesday, Oct. 20	Womanist Theology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walker, "Womanist" • Mitchem, "Finding Questions and Answers in Womanist Theology and Ethics" • Hunter, "Women's Power – Women's Passion"
Thursday, Oct. 22	Mujerista Theology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isasi-Díaz, <i>Mujerista Theology</i>, pp. 60-85 • Chapter Outline due

Postcolonial Theology		
Tuesday, Oct. 27	Postcolonial Theology	Sugirtharajah, <i>Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation</i> , pp. 11-24, 30-40
Thursday, Oct. 29		Soares-Prabhu, "Laughing at Idols"
Tuesday, Nov. 3		Taylor, "Spirit and Liberation"

Eco-Theology		
Thursday, Nov. 5	Eco-Theology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" • McFague, <i>The Body of God</i>, pp. 13-22, 131-50 • Chapter Outline due

Tuesday, Nov. 10		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McFague, pp. 159-74, 180-91 • Thesis Statement Due
Thursday, Nov. 12		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boff, "Social Ecology" • Keller, "Chosen Persons and the Green Ecumenacy"

Tuesday, Nov. 17	Writing Day	No class
------------------	-------------	----------

Process Theology		
Thursday, Nov. 19	God of Limited Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mesle, "Process Theology," pp. 1-16 • Cobb, <i>The Process Perspective</i>, pp. 1-9
Tuesday, Nov. 24	God as Mutable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mesle, pp. 17-32, 58-64 • Cobb, pp. 30-34 • Rough Draft due
Thursday, Nov. 26	Happy Thanksgiving!	
Tuesday, Dec. 1	Jesus and Prayer in Process Thought	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mesle, pp. 104-10 • Cobb, 37-41, 45-8

Religion and Politics		
Thursday, Dec. 3	Christianity in American Politics	Readings TBA
Tuesday, Dec. 8	Christianity in American Politics	Readings TBA
Thursday, Dec. 10	Wrap-up and Evaluations	Final Paper due

Final Paper Guidelines

This paper gives each student the opportunity to engage more deeply a text from one of the categories of contemporary Christian thought that will be examined throughout the course. Each student should choose one book from the supplementary bibliography, read it in its entirety, and write an 8-10 page critical analysis of it. This analysis should somehow address the following questions:

- What is the author's purpose for writing this book? Is it to critique a practice or idea, to propose something new, to look at an old problem in a new way, to offer new sources of theological knowledge or reflection, etc.?
- What is the author's thesis? Quote or paraphrase (and cite) the sentence(s) where the author states definitively what the central argument of the book is.
- How does s/he support this argument? What are the main points of the book? What is his/her methodology?
- What is the socio-political context of this author? How does that context inform the content of his/her argument?
- How does this book or this author fit into the theological categories we discussed in class? What connections can you make between this book and the characteristics of this type of theology? (For example, if you read Jon Sobrino's *Jesus the Liberator*, how does this text relate to Latin American Liberation Theology in general? What characteristics does it share with the other Latin American liberation texts we read? How does it differ?)
- What is your opinion of this text? Does the author's argument convince you? Are there points that resonate with you? Where do you disagree with the author? What questions are left outstanding? Are there specific strengths or weaknesses you would like to highlight?

The majority of the content of this paper should come from your critical reading of the text. You will need to consult outside resources for some elements of this paper (especially for the background of the author), but this should be done only after you have read the entire book and started to form your own ideas and opinions.

Several assignments regarding the paper will be due throughout the semester. You will receive feedback on each of these pieces to aid you in completing the final paper.

Topic Selection: Choose a book from the supplementary bibliography. If you have trouble making a selection, amazon.com provides short synopses and reviews of each of these books. **Email your chosen text to me by 5:00pm on Thursday, September 10.**

Chapter Outlines/Reading Notes: You are expected to read this supplementary text alongside the assigned readings for class. It is crucial to finish this text fairly early in the semester to allow you time to complete the research and writing. To aid you in completing the text in a timely manner, chapter outlines or reading notes will be due periodically throughout the semester. Organize the information in any way that will be helpful to you (formal outline, bulleted points, etc). The purpose is to highlight the main points of each chapter and get a sense of how the author organizes the argument. There is

no minimum page requirement for these notes. Just be sure to include enough information to remind yourself later what was included in each chapter. These assignments will be returned to you the following week with a score of ✓+/ ✓/ ✓- along with comments and suggestions.

Chapter outlines are due throughout the semester (in class on Sept. 24, Oct. 8 and 22, Nov. 5), but your book may have more than four chapters. Therefore, you must decide how you will divide the work. You must submit an outline for every chapter, so on some days you will have to submit outlines for two or three chapters. Consult your calendar to determine the best dates for reading more than one chapter. *Do not leave more than three chapters for November 5!*

Book's Thesis Statement: Submit a paragraph in which you paraphrase the author's thesis and list his/her two or three major points used to support that thesis. **Thesis statement due in class on Tuesday, November 10.**

Rough Draft: Submit a draft of your paper that is as good as you can make it (as if it were your final draft). You will receive the majority of my comments on this draft (with only sporadic comments on the final draft). The purpose of this assignment is to help you get your thoughts in order and receive helpful feedback before writing the final draft. Rough drafts will be returned to you on December 1 with a score of ✓+/ ✓/ ✓-. **Rough draft due by 5:00pm on Tuesday, November 24.**

Final Draft: You may submit your final paper to me by hard copy (in my mailbox) or by email. **Final paper due by 5:00pm on Thursday, December 10.**

Supplementary Bibliography

Latin American Liberation Theology

- Bonino, José Míguez. *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1975.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.
- Petrella, Ivan. *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and Manifesto*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.
- Sobrino, Jon. *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994.
- Sobrino, Jon. *Where is God?: Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.

Black (Liberation) Theology

- Cone, James H. *Black Theology and Black Power*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.
- Cone, James H. *God of the Oppressed*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.
- Hopkins, Dwight N. *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Roberts, J. Deotis. *A Black Political Theology*. Westminster Press, 1974.
- Roberts, J. Deotis. *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, 2nd edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Feminist Theology

- Brock, Rita Nakashima and Rebecca Parker. *Proverbs for Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.
- Chopp, Rebecca S. *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God*. New York: Crossroad, 1989.
- Daly, Mary. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.
- Gebara, Ivone. *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.
- Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*. Continuum, 2007.
- Jones, Serene. *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*. Augsburg Press, 2000.

Jones, Serene. *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Russell, Letty M. *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective: A Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.

Russell, Letty M. *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Schneider, Laurel C. *Re-Imagining the Divine: Confronting the Backlash Against Feminist Theology*. Pilgrim Press, 1999.

Womanist Theology

Coleman, Monica A. *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Crawford, A. Elaine Brown. *Hope in the Holler: A Womanist Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Douglas, Kelly Brown. *The Black Christ*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994.

Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.

Grant, Jacquelyn. *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*. Scholars Press, 1989.

Riggs, Marcia Y. *Awake, Arise, and Act: A Womanist Call for Black Liberation*. Pilgrim Press, 1994.

Mujerista Theology

Aquino, Maria Pilar. *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America*. Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002.

Isasi-Díaz, Ada María. *En la Lucha: A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Gebara, Ivone. *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2002.

Tamez, Elsa. *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

Postcolonial Theology

Althaus-Reid, Marcella. *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender, and Politics*. Routledge, 2001.

Lumbala, François Kabasele. *Celebrating Jesus Christ in Africa: Liturgy and Inculturation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.

- Joh, Wonhee Anne. *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.
- Pui-lan, Kwok. *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.
- Rivera, Mayra. *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

Eco-Theology

- Bauman, Whitney. *Theology, Creation, and Environmental Ethics: From Creatio Ex Nihilo to Terra Nullus*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Boff, Leonardo. *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.
- Boff, Leonardo. *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.
- Boff, Leonardo. *Essential Care: An Ethics of Human Nature*. Baylor University Press, 2008.
- Gebara, Ivone. *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
- McFague, Sallie. *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- McFague, Sallie. *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.
- McFague, Sallie. *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

Process Theology

- Cobb Jr., John B. *A Christian Natural Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.
- Kaufman, Gordon D. Kaufman. *In the beginning... Creativity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.
- Keller, Catherine. *On the Mystery: Discerning God in Process*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.
- Suchocki, Marjorie. *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context*. Wipf & Stock, 1988.