TH 500 Putting Your Theology Together

Hartford Seminary, Fall 2011

Wednesdays, 4:30-7:30pm

Ed Waggoner

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1:30 - 4:00pm

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this course is to explore the systematic interconnections between issues and doctrines that are central to Christian faith and life. This semester’s topics are Theological Method, God, Creation/Fall/Evil, Christology, Christian Community, The Life of the Individual Christian, and Eschatology. What is good theology? How ought Christians to describe God? What is human being? How central should sexuality be in Christian theologies? Who is Jesus Christ? How are humans saved by or through Jesus? How ought Christians to live? What responsibility do Christians have to the earth itself? Do Christian communities actually change the world for the better? Will all human beings be saved? Christians continue to offer lively answers to ‘classic’ questions such as these and to generate new questions. We will consider the work of four influential thinkers, each of which pursues distinctive theological priorities, within a specific cultural and historical context. In dialogue with these theologians and with one another, students will be encouraged to formulate their own constructive theological positions on these topics.

LEARNING GOALS OF THE COURSE

1. Students will analyze and evaluate the respective views of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner on Theological Method, God, Creation/Fall/Evil, Christology, Christian Community, Christian Life, and Eschatology.
2. Students will critically compare the views of Barth and Rahner with those of two contemporary theologians who write in liberationist traditions – Sallie McFague and Marcella Althaus-Reid.
3. Students will develop their own theological positions in conversation with these authors, the course instructor, and one another.
ORGANIZATION OF THE COURSE

Each week’s meeting will include both lecture and discussion.

LECTURES will introduce our general topics and authors, clarify the most distinctive ideas in the assigned readings, and comment on their relevance to the main questions structuring the course.

DISCUSSIONS provide a seminar setting in which we may further analyze and discuss the readings, as well as the questions they raise for contemporary Christian communities.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Weekly reading** (approximately 100 pages per week)

2. **Attendance and active participation at weekly class meetings** (10%)
   a. Students are expected to attend and actively participate in every class meeting.
   b. Students’ comments in class discussions should be informed by the readings.
   c. If you must be absent from a class session, please inform me in advance. However, with the exception of major medical emergencies, your informing me that you will be absent does not release you from the attendance requirements for this course.
   d. There will be a grade reduction for failure to attend and participate. Two missed classes will bring an automatic reduction of 10% of a student’s final course grade. Any student who misses three or more classes will automatically incur a failing final course grade.

3. **Three short papers** (1st Paper 15%, 2nd Paper 35%, 3rd Paper 40%)
   a. Students are expected to write three short papers (6-7 pp. standard margins, 12 pt. font) during the course of the semester. Each paper will address an issue from one of the seven main topics of the course: Theological Method, God, Creation/Fall/Evil, Christology, Christian Community, Life of the Individual Christian, and Eschatology. Students may not write more than one paper on any of these topics.
   b. The first and third paper will be argumentative in structure (i.e., contain a clearly articulated and contestable thesis, advanced by arguments, and including a rebuttal to the strongest possible objection) and will engage the theology of one (or at most two) of our four authors. See ‘GRADING STANDARDS’ below, for further details.
   c. The second paper may be either [1] of the same structure as the first and third, or [2] in dialogue or conversational form.
   d. Over the course of these three short papers, students must engage with (at least) THREE of our four authors.
e. Papers are due on the dates and by the times marked on the syllabus:

- Theological Method papers - 5pm on Friday, September 23
- God papers - 5 pm on Friday, October 7
- Creation/Fall/Evil papers - 5 pm on Friday, October 21
- Christology papers – 5pm on Friday, November 4
- Christian Community papers – 5pm on Friday, November 18
- Life of the Individual Christian papers – 5pm on Monday, December 5
- Eschatology papers – 5pm on Friday, December 16

f. Papers must be submitted BOTH in paper copy (at my office) AND electronically (to my email address: edward.waggoner@yale.edu). If I do not receive BOTH copies by the relevant date and time indicated above, the paper will NOT be eligible for an ‘on-time’ grade.

g. No extensions for papers will be granted, except in case of serious medical problems or major family emergencies. Students with these emergencies may contact the course instructor BEFORE a paper is due to discuss extensions. Late papers (without extension granted) will be marked down one third of a grade (for example, from B+ to B) every 24 hours for three days. Without an extension granted, papers turned in more than 72 hours after the due date will not be accepted.

GRADING STANDARDS

Each course assignment will be graded on a 100-point scale. Final course grades will be awarded according to Hartford Seminary’s rubrics, which differ according to degree program.

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***** The following descriptions of (A), (A-), (B+), (B), (B-), (C+), (C), and (F) will provide you with an idea of how points will be awarded for papers written for this course:

(A): An ‘exemplary’ paper. Perfection, I know, does not exist; but every aspect of this paper is excellent. The thesis statement is crystal clear. It takes a definite and interesting intellectual risk, and I am persuaded from the outset that if the author argues well, I will benefit from that risk - whether or not I finally agree. The author’s own analytical and evaluative choices are easy to follow; the writing concise; the overall argument, well-ordered, lucid, and compelling. The author’s voice rings from every page. I imagine Barth or Rahner or McFague or Althaus-Reid nodding thanks to the author, for taking each of their claims at its very best, in good faith, neither inflating nor artificially diminishing its value. The analysis of the texts deepens the discussion at hand. The presentation is all the more credible for the author’s having briefly acknowledged and effectively met a formidable objection to the thesis. There is beauty in this paper - a well-turned phrase, an elegant conceptual move, or a surprising insight. The paper accomplishes what it sets out to do. It also has an ending that leaves me with a little more to ponder. When I set the paper down, I feel delighted to have read it!

(A-): An ‘excellent’ paper. Like an ‘A’ paper, this one has a crystal clear thesis-statement, that is especially perceptive or ambitious. It is excellent in most (but not all) of the ways mentioned above. It may not accomplish all of what it set out to do, or some of its argumentation may not be as compelling as it could be. Maybe it does not quite overcome the objection it raises. OR, it is a perfectly well-executed paper, about which I think to myself, ‘Just one more draft, to make the analysis a bit sharper!’

(B+): This paper is ‘very good.’ The thesis risks less, but is still clear and makes a contestable claim. The introductory paragraph gives a fairly good idea of how the paper will proceed. The writing is effective, but may be uneven in patches. The general structure of the argument is apparent, but may contain a gap or distracting detour that reduces its overall persuasiveness. The author’s voice runs throughout the paper, with few interruptions. Claims on behalf of Barth or Rahner or McFague or Althaus-Reid are accurate and supported with textual evidence. The analysis of texts and ideas is solid. Nearly every paragraph has a single main point and nearly every paragraph takes the reader further toward the thesis, but there are a few bumpy transitions from one to the next. As a reader, I have had to work on behalf of the paper’s argument.

(B): A ‘good’ paper. The thesis statement needs greater specificity or concision; or it needs to aim significantly higher. The introductory paragraph may be a little disjointed, but the reader can see that something is at stake for the author in the writing of this paper. The structure of the paper detracts from the effectiveness of its overall argument. There may be a minor inaccuracy with respect to the ideas and arguments from Barth or Rahner or McFague or Althaus-Reid. There is evidence for all claims that are made in this paper, but sometimes too little of it. Quotations may be too frequent or too lengthy. Claims are usually well-made and germane, but occasionally unconvincing or irrelevant. The analysis of the texts could be much stronger. There may be redundancy of ideas. This paper may present no objection to its own thesis. Transitions between paragraphs sometimes jar or confuse the reader. The concluding section of this paper merely restates the introduction.

(B-): This is a ‘satisfactory’ paper. There is evidence of the author’s effort to weigh-in on the relevant topic, but the thesis statement needs to be totally re-constructed. In some cases, the reader is unable to identify any thesis at all. Either way, the reader has only a dim idea of what the main point of this paper could be. There is little or no help provided to the reader in anticipating how an argument will unfold. Paragraphs are internally chaotic (i.e., very few of them have a main point, or too many of them have
multiple and at times contradictory points) and/or disconnected from one another. The views of Barth or Rahner or McFague or Althaus-Reid may be frequently misunderstood or misrepresented. There is little or no evidence given for the paper’s claims. These claims may parrot material from lectures or discussion sections, or rest on ‘straw-person’ arguments; or maybe there simply are not many claims for the reader to evaluate. The prose may be opaque. There may also be serious problems with grammar, spelling, or proofreading errors.

(C+/C): An ‘acceptable’ paper. It has most of the weaknesses that could apply to a (B-) paper. OR, this paper may be free of egregious errors, and beautifully written, but make only token reference to texts from Barth or Rahner or McFague or Althaus-Reid. OR, this paper may offer little more than a summary of the text.

(F): This is a ‘failing’ paper. Beyond the deficiencies of a ‘C/C+’ paper, a ‘failing’ paper has one or more of the following problems: fatal internal contradictions; mean-spirited claims; no reference to our texts from Barth or Rahner or McFague or Althaus-Reid; gross inaccuracies; pervasive incoherence; problems with grammar, spelling, and proofreading errors that prove insurmountable for the reader.

POLICY ON ACADEMIC HONESTY

Students are expected to do their own work for all assignments. Plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind is a serious offense at Hartford Seminary. For a brief explanation of plagiarism, consult the Hartford Seminary Student Handbook. It is your responsibility to know what plagiarism and academic dishonesty are. Any violation of these rules in this course will result in a failing grade for the assignment, and a failing final course grade. I will report any instance of plagiarism to the Academic Dean. As indicated in the Seminary Catalogue, “the Academic Dean will then invoke the Student Disciplinary Policy and Procedure (see full policy in the Student Handbook). Through that process the situation will be reviewed and any additional penalties that may be warranted (up to and including expulsion from the school) will be determined.”

WRITING CONSULTANTS

From the Hartford Seminary Student Handbook: “Hartford Seminary has two Writing Consultants on staff whose services available at no extra cost to graduate program students. The Writing Consultants provide individual support and are available by appointment only. The Writing Consultant cubicle is located on the 2nd floor of 77 Sherman Street across from the Business Office, and this is where the Consultant will meet with the student at the scheduled time. For more information about the Writing Consultants, please obtain their guidelines and contact information from on- site or online forms center, or contact the Executive Assistant to the Dean at 860-509-9553.”

REQUIRED TEXTS (5)

1. ONLINE readings from Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Marcella Althaus-Reid, and Sallie McFague.


Schedule of Reading

(All required readings are available online, as PDF files, unless otherwise noted)

W 7 September  Introduction: *Theological Testimonies*

A. Karl Barth  
B. Karl Rahner  
C. Marcella Althaus-Reid  
D. Sallie McFague

**Reading < 45 pp.>**

1. Karl Barth, “Testimony to Jesus Christ” [2 pp.]  

W 14 September  Theological Method (I)

A. Karl Barth  
B. Karl Rahner

**Reading < 63 pp.>**

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1, 148-154 (‘The Readiness of Man’) [6 pp.]  
2. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1, 179-204 (‘The Hiddenness of God’) [25 pp.]  

W 21 September  Theological Method (II)

A. Marcella Althaus-Reid  
B. Sallie McFague

**Reading <98 pp.>**
1. Marcella Althaus-Reid, “From Liberation Theology to Indecent Theology: The Trouble with Normality in Theology” [18 pp.]

W 28 September God (I)

A. Karl Barth
B. Karl Rahner

Reading <108 pp.>


W 5 October God (II)

A. Marcella Althaus-Reid
B. Sallie McFague

Reading < 97 pp.>

2. Sallie McFague, ‘God and the World’ and ‘God as Mother’ and ‘God as Lover’ - Chapters 3-5 of Models of God [84 pp.]

W 12 October Creation, Fall, Evil (I)

A. Karl Barth
B. Karl Rahner

Reading <113 pp.>

the Doctrine in Dogmatics,' ‘Jesus Christ, Electing and Elected,’ and ‘The Eternal Will of God in the Election of Jesus Christ’) [39 pp.]

W 19 October

**Creation, Fall, Evil (II)**

A. Ivone Gebara
B. Sallie McFague

*Reading <134 pp.>*


W 26 October

**Christology (I)**

A. Karl Barth
B. Karl Rahner

*Reading <100 pp.>*

2. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.1, 122-123 (‘Jesus Christ the Mediator’) [1 p.]
Recommended:


W 2 November  **Christology (II)**

A. Marcella Althaus-Reid

B. Sallie McFague

Reading <88 pp.>


W 9 November  **Christian Community (I)**

A. Karl Barth

B. Karl Rahner

Reading <105 pp.>


2. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.2, 614-623 (‘The True Church’) [9 pp.]


W 16 November  **Christian Community (II)**

A. Marcella Althaus-Reid

B. Sallie McFague
Reading <94 pp.>


W 23 November Reading Day - no class

W 30 November Life of the Individual Christian

A. Karl Barth
B. Karl Rahner
C. Marcella Althaus-Reid
D. Sallie McFague

Reading <126 pp.>

5. Marcella Althaus-Reid, ‘The Theology of Sexual Stories’ - Chapter 4 of Indecent Theology, 125-164 [39 pp.] Not online.

W 7 December Eschatology (I)

A. Karl Barth
B. Karl Rahner

Reading <68 pp.>
1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.1, 725-739 (‘The Time of the Community’) [14 pp.]
2. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.3.2, 917-942 (‘The Subject of Hope and Hope’ and ‘Life in Hope’) [25 pp.]

W 14 December

**Eschatology (II)**

A. Marcella Althaus-Reid
B. Sallie McFague

Reading <57 pp.>

1. Marcella Althaus-Reid, ‘Doing Theology of Memory: Counting Crosses and Resurrections’ - Chapter 8 of *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 113-123 [10 pp.] Not online.
4. Sallie McFague, ‘Is a Different World Possible? Human Dignity and the Integrity of Creation’ - Chapter 8 of *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming*, 143-158 [15 pp.]

W 21 December

**Conclusion: Weaving Strands**