

Perkins Regional Course of Study School
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COS 122: Theological Heritage I

Pre-Class Assignment

A Brief Introductory Word:

Since the beginning of the faith Christians have deeply valued the life of the mind. As St. Paul says in Romans, "...be transformed by the renewing of your mind." To that end the Church has, since its earliest days, set aside people whose vocation is to peer deeply into the mysteries of the faith—or to put it differently, to try to make sense of the common confession that Christians make in their worship.

You are, in this course, part of that people set apart for this task. Your vocation—the task to which God has called you—is, quite simply, *to think*. The reading and writing you will do in the coming months are not preparation for the ministry; it is the ministry. This work is not something that you set aside for the more basic and important ministerial work of, say sermon preparation or hospital visitation. Rather, it is the basic and important work of a genuine Christian vocation.

This is a high calling, and like all of God's callings it comes with the promise of God's grace. It is God who calls you to the work, God who is with you as you persevere in it, and God who brings it to its conclusion. I encourage you, then, to devote yourselves to this work, to trust that God is with you in it. The reward of peering deeply into the mysteries of faith is of "surpassing greatness:" the reward is knowing Christ himself (Philippians 3:8).

Course Description:

This course introduces the student to theological reflection in the Wesleyan tradition. Basic terms, tasks, and methods of Christian theology will be introduced. Representative classical themes will be defined and illustrated. The course provides a foundation for further historical and theological study.

Course Goals for COS 122 – Theological Heritage I: Introduction

This course introduces the student to theological reflection in the Wesleyan tradition. Basic terms, tasks, and methods of Christian theology will be introduced. Representative classical themes will be defined and illustrated. The course provides a foundation for further historical and theological study.

Students will be able to:

1. Examine their understanding of faith, sin, salvation, grace, and the place of doctrine in the life of the Church.
2. Use and understand classical theological terms and themes.

3. Critically consider the sources of theological reflection, including scripture, tradition, experience and reason.
4. Reflect theologically as a resource for pastoral ministry.

Required Texts

Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

Ted A. Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials Revised Edition* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2011).

Pre-Class Assignment (30% of Total Grade)

For your pre-class assignment, you must write two essays and one mock Op-Ed. As you write, you are encouraged to approach the essays as a spiritual exercise through which new theological and pastoral insights may emerge. Each essay is worth 100 points. The Op-Ed is also worth 100 points.

1. Conduct a “close reading” of Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust*. Then write a thesis driven essay (4-6 pages in length) addressing the following questions:
 - a. Summarize Williams’s major concern(s) or central claim(s) in *Tokens of Trust*. Of what, if anything, is Williams trying to convince you? In other words, what is Williams trying to accomplish with this text? How is he doing it?
 - b. According to Williams, what is the purpose or objective of Christian theology? And how should Christians pursue theology inquiry? Be specific and make sure to cite examples from the book.
 - c. Finally, critically assess Williams’s position. Do you agree or disagree, and why?
2. Read Ted A. Campbell’s *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials*. Write a thesis-driven essay (4-6 pages in length) responding to the following prompts:
 - a. Describe in your own words Campbell’s view of the Methodist theological tradition. What distinguishes Wesleyan theology from other forms of Christian theology. Be specific. For instance, are there doctrines or theological teachings that that are unique? Why is this Wesleyan distinctive important? Do you agree with it? Explain. Devote 2-3 pages to this section.
 - b. With this Wesleyan distinctive in mind, compare (and if necessary contrast) Williams’s account of Christology with the Wesleyan account articulated by Campbell. Devote 2-3 pages to this section.
3. Read the Op-Eds that appear below. Notice how both ministers use Christian theological reasoning to make claims about the shape of contemporary life that they think should be compelling for both Christians and non-Christians. Now, imagine that you are the pastor of a small Methodist church in a rural area. As the pastor of that church, you have been invited to write an Op-Ed for that paper addressing the question of the opioid crisis. Write an Op-Ed that uses the Christian doctrine of the incarnation (the belief that God became a

human) to make an argument about how your small rural community should address the opioid crisis. Your Op-Ed must:

- a. Briefly and adequately explain the doctrine of the incarnation in a way that makes it intelligible to a Christian and non-Christian audience,
- b. Make an argument about what that doctrine suggests about how we should understand and address the opioid crisis in a local community,
 - i. Your argument may focus on any number of issues. For instance, you could argue about how we should treat victims of the crisis, or local policies that might help address the crisis, or the way that churches might help address the crisis, etc.
- c. Use commonly accepted English—including proper spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc. Imagine that many people reading your Op-Ed will make judgments about the validity of the Christian faith based on what you write. Does your writing reflect a rigorous and disciplined theological mind? Poor writing suggests that you don't take your message seriously—and that means your reader won't take it seriously either.

<https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2019/10/27/if-your-heart-doesnt-break-for-asylum-seekers-you-may-have-a-spiritual-heart-conditions>

<https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2018/06/01/the-church-can-no-longer-ignore-the-chasm-between-catholicism-and-catholics/>