

## INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY (TH 550)

Spring 2002

Professor Laurence H. Kant, © 2002 Laurence H. Kant, All rights reserved  
Lexington Theological Seminary, Mandrell Hall, rm. 208  
Class Meetings: Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 2:00-2:50 P.M.  
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This course seeks to introduce students to the study of the concept of God and the relation of God to human beings and the world. As part of this endeavor, we will strive to understand the nature of religious faith, practice, and experience.

We will cover the major categories of theological thought: God; transcendence and immanence; monotheism, polytheism, henotheism/monolatry, pantheism, and panentheism; sacred geography (space) and sacred history (time); revelation; authority--experience, reason, tradition, and scripture (including biblical hermeneutics); creation and anthropology; error, sin, suffering, and the problem of evil; free will and determinism; salvation; community and ritual; love, compassion, forgiveness, and surrender; body, soul, and spirit; sexuality and gender; and death, afterlife, and eternal life. Specific components of Christian theology will receive attention: Trinity; Christ and Christology; incarnation; atonement; grace; faith, works, and justification; resurrection; and church and sacraments. In doing this, we will consider various theological approaches: historical theology, philosophical theology (including existentialism), natural theology, systematic theology, mysticism, feminist theology, process theology, and liberation theology. Finally, we will conclude with discussion of the relation of Christian theology to the theologies of other world religions (especially Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism).

THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT is a crucial concept in this course. It means that, in regard to religion and spirituality, we will seek to develop the capacity to think clearly and articulately, to recognize (and be able to analyze) the complex nature of God and our world, to understand various contexts (historical and social), to be able to read theological texts closely and critically, and to become well-versed in theological language and traditions. I also believe that true theological thinking involves the conscious ability to think with our hearts and feel with our minds. We will strive to do that every day.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Every week (except Weeks 1, 7-8, and 15) on Friday each student will prepare a brief RESPONSE PAPER of approximately one to two pages on a topic specified by me. As long as you can write clearly and coherently and put some effort and thought into the assignments, you should find that you will do quite well. These will receive marks of simply "H" (highest pass = A range), "HP" (high pass = B range), and "P" (pass = C range). I expect the vast majority to be in the "HP" range, and you will not get below a "P" if you do the work. You will have a take-home MID-TERM EXAMINATION on March 8 (due back to me by March 15). There will be a FINAL TERM PAPER due May 15. You will receive a list of possible topics by mid-February, but you may begin work on a topic as long as you check with me. I expect an INITIAL DRAFT of a significant portion of this paper by April 2. You may choose to write your paper as a team of up to three individuals (but remember that this can involve complex interpersonal negotiations).

There will be an EXTRA-CREDIT assignment of a book report for those who want to raise their grade. It is also due May 17. It involves reading the book by Keith Ward, Religion and Revelation. You will then write a summary of the book and a response, no longer than ten pages.

The BREAKDOWN OF YOUR FINAL GRADE will be as follows: 1) response papers 30%; 2) final paper 30%; 3) mid-term 20%; 4) class participation, effort, and attendance 20%. The final grade is based on a 100 point scale.

The EXTRA-CREDIT ASSIGNMENT can affect your final grade by up to 5 points out of a possible 100 (e.g. an “A” on the extra credit could raise your grade from 82-87, or from a “B-“ to a “B+”; even a “B” on the extra credit could raise your grade from a “B-“ to a “B,” or from a “B” to a “B+.”)

WRITING AND READING: If you ever feel that you need assistance with WRITING, you should consult with Anne Gregory. As I deem it appropriate, I will refer any student to Anne Gregory. THE ABILITY TO WRITE IS A KEY COMPONENT FOR REACHING YOUR GOALS IN THIS CLASS. You should feel no embarrassment at seeking help. Writing is a form of expression and a tool that we all (including me) need continually to develop and improve. Having the ability to write clearly, properly, and articulately will rightfully give you confidence in many aspects of your professional and personal life.

The ability to READ CRITICALLY is also extremely important. This means that (1) you are able not only to understand the meaning of each sentence and paragraph, but that you have the ability to ascertain the overall structure and thrust of a discussion or argument. When you have done that, you will need to have (or to develop) (2) a knack for comparing the ideas of one essay with those of other essays. Finally, you are not obligated to read every single word of every essay. Sometimes you may need to (3) SKIM in a structured and thoughtful manner. Together these three elements constitute important features of the ART OF READING.

#### COURSE MATERIALS

John B. Cobb, Jr., Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way Beyond Absolutism and Relativism (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999). = “Transforming Christianity.”

Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (eds), Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks (2nd ed., Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994). = “INTRODUCTION.”

Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (eds), Readings in Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985). = “READINGS.”

Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (eds), A New Handbook of Christian Theology (2nd ed., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992). = HANDBOOK.

Jaroslav Pelikan (ed), The World Treasury of Modern Religious Thought (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990). = “WORLD TREASURY.”

Lucinda Vardey, God in All Worlds: An Anthology of Contemporary Spiritual Writing (New York: Random House, 1995). = “VARDEY.”

Keith Ward, Religion and Revelation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). This book is not found in the schedule, but is used as the basis for an extra-credit assignment.

MOST BOOKS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE ARE ALSO ON RESERVE AT THE LIBRARY (except for Vardey).

#### WEEK 1

January 31: Introduction to the class

February 1: God

Hodgson/King, Introduction, Chapter 3, "God"

Vardey, Chapter 1, "The Fire Beyond the Tomb"

Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur," in World Treasury, pp. 177-78

#### WEEK 2

February 5: God

Hodgson/King, Readings, Chapter 3, "God"

Miguel De Unamuno, "The Tragic Sense of Life," in World Treasury, pp. 289-99

Dorothy Day, "The Sacredness of Life," in World Treasury, pp. 285-88

Lin Yu-Tang, "The Importance of Living," in World Treasury, pp. 399-410

February 7: God

World Treasury, Chapter 3, "The Grandeur of God" (READ ONLY essays by Immanuel Kant, Dorothy Sayres, Albert Einstein, and Étienne Gilson)

Nishido Kitaro, "A Study of Good," in World Treasury, pp. 453-61

February 8: God

Handbook, "God," "Idolatry," "Panentheism," "Theism"

Paul Tillich, "The God above God," in World Treasury, pp. 300-07

Alfred North Whitehead, "The New Reformation," in World Treasury, pp. 206-17

#### WEEK 3

February 12: Space, Time, and Revelation

Handbook, "Revelation," "Space," "Time"

Hodgson, Introduction, Chapter 4, "Revelation"

February 14: Space, Time, and Revelation

Hodgson, Readings, Chapter 4, "Revelation"

Vardey, Chapter 4, "The Spiritual Experience"

February 15: Space, Time, and Revelation

Vardey, Chapter 5, "Strengthening the Self"

#### WEEK 4

February 19: NO CLASS. PLEASE READ, HOWEVER, FOR THE FOLLOWING TOPIC

Authority: Experience, Reason, Scripture, and Tradition

Hodgson, Introduction, Chapter 2, "Scripture and Tradition"

Hodgson, Readings, Chapter 2, "Scripture and Tradition"

Handbook, "Hermeneutics," "Scripture," "Tradition"

February 21: Authority: Experience, Reason, Scripture, and Tradition

Handbook, "Authority," "Epistemology," "Experience," "Natural Theology"

World Treasury, Chapter 4 "The Reconstruction of Tradition," pp. 319-51

February 22: Authority: Experience, Reason, Scripture, and Tradition

World Treasury, Chapter 4, "The Reconstruction of Tradition," pp. 352-90

#### WEEK 5

February 26: Authority: Experience, Reason, Scripture, and Tradition

World Treasury, Chapter 2, "The Will to Believe," pp. 95-129

February 28 Creation and Anthropology

Hodgson, Introduction, "Creation and Providence"

Handbook, "Anthropology," "Creation," "Evolution," "Human Being"

March 1: Creation and Anthropology

Hodgson, Readings, "Creation and Providence"

#### WEEK 6

March 5: Creation and Anthropology

Hodgson, Introduction, "Human Being"

Hodgson, Readings, "Human Being"

March 7: Sin, Suffering, and the Problem of Evil

Hodgson, Introduction, "Sin and Evil"

Hodgson, Readings, "Sin and Evil"

March 8: MID-TERM HANDED OUT

Sin, Suffering, and the Problem of Evil

Vardey, Chapter 8, "The Struggle with Evil"

Handbook, "Freedom"

#### WEEK 7

March 12: Sin, Suffering, and the Problem of Evil

Vardey, Chapter 9, "The Hidden Face of Evil"

March 14: Sin, Suffering, and the Problem of Evil  
Vardey, Chapter 10, "Liberation,"

March 15: MID-TERM DUE

Christ and Salvation

Hodgson, Introduction, Chapter 8, "Christ and Salvation"  
Handbook, "Christology"

BREAK

March 18-22: NO CLASS

WEEK 8

March 26: Christ and Salvation

Hodgson, Readings, "Christ and Salvation"  
Handbook, "Soteriology"

March 28: NO CLASS. PLEASE READ, HOWEVER, FOR THE FOLLOWING TOPIC:  
Community and Rituals

Vardey, Chapter 6, "Archetypes, Myths, and Ritual"  
Handbook, "Church," "Myth," "Sacraments"

March 29: NO CLASS (Good Friday)

WEEK 9

April 2: Community and Rituals

Hodgson, Introduction, Chapter 9, "Church"

April 4: Community and Rituals

Hodgson, Readings, Chapter 9, "Church"

April 5: Community and Rituals

Hodgson, Introduction, Chapter 10, "Sacraments"  
Friedrich Heiler, "The Essence of Prayer," in World Treasury, pp. 308-16

WEEK 10

April 9: Love, Compassion, Forgiveness, and Surrender

Vardey, Chapter 11, "The Way"; Chapter 12, "Being for God"; Chapter 13, "Doing for God"

April 11: Love, Compassion, Forgiveness, and Surrender

Teilhard de Chardin, "Phenomenon of Man," in World Treasury, pp. 428-40  
Soren Kierkegaard, "Love Abides," in World Treasury, pp. 393-98  
Albert Schweitzer, "Reverence for Life," in World Treasury, pp. 238-43)  
Handbook, "Grace," "Love"

April 12: Death, Afterlife, Eternal Life

World Treasury, "Visions of the Other World" (READ ONLY essays by Black Elk and Daisetz Suzuki)

Vardey, Chapter 16, "Death"; Chapter 18, "Rebirth"

#### WEEK 11

April 16: Death, Afterlife, Eternal Life

Vardey, Chapter 17, "The Gate of Life"

Hodgson, Introduction, "The Kingdom of God and Life Everlasting"

Handbook, "Death and Eternal Life"

April 18: Death, Afterlife, Eternal Life

Hodgson, Readings, Chapter 12, "The Kingdom of God and Life Everlasting"

Theological Approaches: An Overview of Our Work

Hodgson, Introduction, "Task of Theology"

April 19: Theological Approaches: An Overview of Our Work

Hodgson, Readings, "Task of Theology"

Handbook, "Historical Theology," "Natural Theology," "Philosophical Theology,"  
"Process Theology," "Systematic Theology"

#### WEEK 12

April 23: Theological Approaches: A Call to Action

World Treasury, Chapter 8, "Faith and Freedom" (Read only essays by Barbara Ward, Walter Rauschenbusch, James Russell Lowell, Mahatma Gandhi,

Martin Luther King)

Handbook, "Social Gospel"

April 25: Theological Approaches: A Call to Action

Hodgson, Introduction, Chapter 14, "The Christian Paradigm," (READ ONLY ESSAYS by James Cone, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Gordon Kaufman)

Handbook, "Liberation Theology"

April 26: Theological Approaches: Mysticism

World Treasury, Chapter 7, "Visions of the Other World" (READ ESSAYS ONLY by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Friedrich von Hügel, Martin Lings, Evelyn Underhill, Gershom Scholem)

Handbook, "Mysticism"

#### WEEK 13

April 30: Theological Approaches: Feminist and Womanist Theology

Vardey, Chapter 7, "The Great Mother"

Handbook, "Feminist Theology"; "Womanist Theology"

May 2: Theology and World Religions

Hodgson, Introduction, Chapter 13, "The Religions"; Chapter 14, "The Christian Paradigm"

May 3: Theology and World Religions

John Hick, "One God, Many Images," in Readings, pp. 397-402

World Treasury, Chapter 8, "Faith and Freedom" (READ ONLY ESSAYS by Abraham Heschel, Hamilton Gibb, and Yu-Lan Fung)

Fazlur Rahman, "The Qur'a\*n," in World Treasury, pp. 260-71

WEEK 14

May 7: Theology and World Religions

Vardey, Chapter 14, "The Guides," 435-70

John Cobb, Transforming Christianity, Chapter 2-4

May 9: Theology in a Post-Denominational Age

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Divinity School Address," in World Treasury, 244-59

Nathan Söderblom, "Continued Revelation," in World Treasury, pp. 272-84

Vardey, "The Spiritual Age," pp 679-700

May 10: Theology in a Post-Denominational Age

Vardey, "The Spiritual Age," pp. 701-25

WEEK 15

May 14: Theology in a Post Denominational Age

Vardey, "Emerging World"

Transforming Christianity, Chapter 6, "Responses to Relativism"

May15: FINAL PAPER DUE (NO CLASS)

May 17: EXTRA-CREDIT ASSIGNMENT DUE (NO CLASS)