

## **Liberal Theology**

**TS442-INT: January Intensive (January 10-14, 2010)**

**Professor Mike Hogue**

### **I. Overview**

This is a reading-intensive and a lecture- and discussion-based fundamental course in liberal theology. Rather than providing an exhaustive historical survey, the course examines methods and models of select exemplary liberal theological thinkers and movements. From Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher forward to select contemporary voices, the course interrogates questions of theological method and content in liberal theology. Among other themes, focal attention is given to the contested roles of experience and reason in liberal theology, disputed anthropological concerns (i.e. issues related to theological accounts of human condition), and the relation between liberal and liberation theologies. The course is guided by the view that liberal theology is a tradition constituted by particular intrinsic and extrinsic tensions—methodological and substantive, ecclesiological and cultural, etc.—and that these tensions continue to require vigilant critical attention. Endeavoring to model the tasks of constructive liberal theology, the course is designed to surface some of these tensions so that students can begin to negotiate them for their own lives and ministries. The structure of the course resembles an hourglass: we begin with broad concerns, come to a focus, and then expand outward again, concluding by considering some of the contemporary challenges to and possibilities for contemporary liberal theology and liberal religious ministry.

### **II. Objectives**

Through this course, students will:

- \*gain critical facility with liberal theological discourse—its forms, aims, and methods;

- \*become familiar with central themes and thinkers in liberal theology;

- \*acquire insight into the possibilities and challenges of liberal theology;

- \*begin to articulate distinctive working liberal theologies attuned to cultural and institutional contexts.

### **III. Statement of Accommodation/Adaptation/Extension**

Students experience learning challenges for various reasons. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because you are differently abled, please contact me as soon as possible. Likewise, see me if you encounter difficulty with the course or feel that you could be performing at a higher level, or have a learning style issue that provides a

challenge. As an instructor, my obligation is to ensure that the work you encounter is relevant to your needs and accessible. Unless you come to see me about these or other related issues, I will assume your learning needs are being met.

*No extensions or incompletes will be granted for this course, except in the case of major personal or family emergency.*

#### **IV. Expectations and Evaluation**

##### **A. Reading Agenda**

In order to be prepared adequately for our January meetings, please begin reading as soon as possible. This course will not work very well if students reserve all of their reading for December. The material is sometimes complex and requires time for reflection. And the understandings and insights that will emerge are cumulative. With these points in mind, then, *please read the texts assigned through session three by the end of October; the texts through session six by the end of November; and the remaining texts by mid-December.*

##### **B. Journaling**

Also, in order to provide material for you to work with during the intensive week, please keep a reading journal of some kind. **THIS IS FOR YOUR BENEFIT.** I will not evaluate these, but I do expect you to show me this journal at some point during the week. The journal work will serve as part of your final grade. Please especially keep track of what for you stand out as the **BIG QUESTIONS** (for theology and for ministry) that the different thinkers and texts provoke for you. Your journal and your questions will be very important for your final project, as well as for our in-class discussions.

As you read and journal, you might want to keep track of the following questions: 1) What is the “gist” of the argument the author is making? 2) Which sources (i.e., historical figures, institutional authorities, philosophical, religious, social and natural scientific authorities) does the author draw from in order to make his/her case? 3) How does the author identify himself/herself professionally, religiously, socio-culturally? 4) Which moral and political challenges, if any, motivate the author’s work? 5) Is there a relation between the rhetorical form of the text and the argument and sources used by the author? 6) Does the author respond to anticipated critiques of his/her project? What are these anticipated critiques, and how does the author engage them? 7) What practical and institutional challenges, if any, does the author anticipate?

##### **C. Final Project**

Submit a paper that articulates what you take to be the 5 most important questions this course has provoked for you. For each question, explain why you think the

question is important. Draft a strategy/plan for your ongoing exploration of each question (e.g., through further course work, through reading, through prayer/meditation, through interviews, through a religious education curriculum, through worship or preaching, etc...). The final paper should not be more than 10pp (double-spaced).

#### **D. Grades**

You will receive 10 points for your journal, 30 points for participation—I recognize a variety of styles of participation and contribution), and 60 points for your final project.

#### **V. Calendar and Bibliography**

This is a reading intensive course. Some items will be made available on LiveText, as indicated. You might find that some of these are publicly accessible electronic texts. Project Gutenberg is a good first place to look.

##### **1. First Session (Monday AM): Course Introduction**

\*Paul Razor, *Faith Without Certainty*

\*Other resources (not required): Gary Dorrien's *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 3 vols.; Christopher Evans', *Liberalism without Illusions*

##### **2. Second Session (Monday PM): Kant's Ethico-Theology**

\*Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* (read Books I-III)

\*Counterpoint: Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," (on LiveText)

\*Other resources (not required): Pamela Sue Anderson and Jordan Bell, *Kant and Theology*

##### **3. Third Session (Tuesday AM): Schleiermacher's Subjective-Experiential Turn**

\*Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Cultured Despisers* (read at least first and second speeches)

\*Counterpoint: Karl Barth, "Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century," in *The Humanity of God* (on LiveText)

##### **4. Fourth Session (Tuesday PM): Channing and Ballou**

\*William Ellery Channing: "Unitarian Christianity"

\*Hosea Ballou: *A Treatise on Atonement*

**5. Fifth Session (Wednesday AM): Emerson and Parker**

\*Emerson: “The Divinity School Address,” “Nature,” and “Experience”

\*Theodore Parker: “The Transient and Permanent in Christianity”

**6. Sixth Session (Wednesday PM): Religious Humanisms**

\*John Dewey: *A Common Faith*

\*Anthony Pinn: *African American Humanist Principles* (selections on LiveText)

**7. Seventh Session (Thursday AM): Liberation-isms**

\*James Cone: *A Black Theology of Liberation* (read at least chs. 1, 2, 4, and 5)

\*Monica Coleman: *Making a Way out of No Way: A Womanist Theology*

\*Other resources (not required): John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*; C. Robert Mesle, *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead*

**8. Eighth Session (Thursday PM): RISK**

\*Sharon Welch: *A Feminist Ethics of Risk*

**9. Ninth Session (Friday AM): RENEWAL...Again**

\*James Luther Adams: Selections from *The Essential JLA* (your choice); and “Why Liberal?” *The Journal of Liberal Religion* 1.1 (Autumn 1939), “The Liberalism that is Dead,” *The Journal of Liberal Religion* 2.1 (Winter 1940); JLA: “The Ages of Liberalism,” *An Examined Faith* (essays provided on LiveText)

**10. Tenth Session (Friday PM): Where you’ve been and where you’re going...**