

STMA 506—Sin and Grace — Fall 2006

Instructor: Amy Wyatt

Meeting: Tues 5:45- 8:35pm

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Office Hours: I will be available on Mondays and Wednesdays from 10:00-11:30am
SU Theology Department, Casey building, Room 219; or by appointment.

Course Description

A systematic and historical exploration of the themes of sin and grace in Christian tradition, including consideration of how human life is affected by each, as well as discussion of the various ways sin and grace have taken shape in human history.

Course Objectives

This course will provide students with a survey of both the *process* and *content* of various historical and contemporary theological approaches to sin and grace within the Christian tradition. The principal aim of this course is to consider how “doing theology” may result in, and indeed may spring from, living in a manner that attends to human experience and the needs of the world.

With an eye toward developing deeper understanding of these central issues, we will use a variety of media—poetry, scripture, film, theological texts, arts, music, experiential exercises, small and large group conversations, personal reflection and praxis— as vehicles for exploring questions together, such as: How does one “do” theology? What are the key tenets of sin and grace within the Christian faith? How do we reflect our understanding of sin and embody grace in Christian ministry? How does our experience of and theology about God impact our relationships with other people and the world, especially in terms of issues of justice and decisions about what constitutes ethical living?

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will have developed:

- 1) an understanding of the historical development and contemporary significance of the Christian theological themes of sin and grace.
- 2) an ability to think critically and empathetically and to express oneself clearly and creatively, with respect to these theological issues.
- 3) a sensitivity to the difference gender makes (and does not make) in human experience and in theological reflection.
- 4) a sensitivity to the ways race, class, and culture deepen and complicate human experience, and contribute to theological reflection.
- 5) an ability to articulate one’s experience and perspective with regard to sin and grace.
- 6) an appreciation for the experiences of sin and grace in one’s ministry, including a sense of how the themes of sin and grace are enacted in worship, preaching, education, pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, social justice, and other ministerial activities.

Required Texts

Gulley, Philip and James Mulholland. *If Grace Is True*. New York: Harper Collins, 2003.

Haight, Roger, S. J. *The Experience and Language of Grace*. New York: Paulist Press, 1979.

Nelson, Susan L. *Healing the Broken Heart: Sin, Alienation, and the Gift of Grace*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1997.

Sobrino, Jon. *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994.

READER— Will be available at the COPY MART on Madison Avenue.

My Teaching and Learning Philosophy

A religious studies class, and academic inquiry in general, is most fruitfully directed toward *living the questions*. In other words, this class is designed to be an exercise in consciously exploring and articulating the profound issues of life with which we naturally contend as human beings. We have an opportunity as a learning community to examine deeply our own beliefs and the beliefs of others, with an eye toward fostering mutually increased understanding. Thus, we shall share responsibility for creating a safe and respectful classroom environment during our communal conversation, honoring our diverse ideas, approaches, and perspectives regarding this topic.

Assessment and Grading:

Please invest the time to read the assigned materials thoroughly and reflectively. You are expected to demonstrate the fact that you have *thoughtfully* engaged the reading materials by participating actively in small group and class-wide discussions and activities. We will share responsibility as a group for asking pertinent questions and exploring possible theological responses, developed from our reading, reflection and experience. If you know that you tend to be reserved or quiet, please make the extra effort to join in creating the conversation in this class, as it makes our seminar theological conversation richer. Remember, asking thoughtful questions is a significant means of participation. Hearing your perspective and voice will also help me to assess your development accurately.

In addition, please note that I expect everyone to act in a manner consistent with the standards of academic integrity. Furthermore, since we meet only once a week, any unexcused absences will lower your final participation grade. As a general rule I will not accept late papers. However, if you are experiencing undue pressure or have extenuating personal circumstances, such as severe illness or a death in the family, which makes the timely completion of your assignments challenging, please let me know. Likewise, if you are an ESL student requiring extra time on exams, work with a particular learning style or disability, or have other concerns, about which you feel it would be helpful for me to be aware, please feel free to contact me. My aim is to help you in your efforts to be successful in graduate school, and I can best do that if you communicate with me about your concerns.

GRADING— The course will include 300 points, distributed as follows:

Class Participation:

50 points

As a participant in an advanced seminar course, I expect you to have read the assigned material and to be an informed and thoughtful contributor (in both the sense of being reflective and courteous) in classroom conversations and activities. Here I am honoring fundamentally your active *engagement* with the course, especially insofar as you ask relevant questions and make thoughtful comments with respect to the readings, during each class period.

Discussion Starters:

50 points

Each student is responsible for offering to the class one “discussion starter” for each class period (bringing copies for each class member). Discussion starters should be one typed, double-spaced page in length and should propose one clearly articulated and substantial topic for class discussion, arising out of the assigned readings. Be sure to give enough information to demonstrate:

- that you have read and understood the fundamental arguments in the reading;
- that you sense how your discussion starter relates to the issues at hand;
- that you can articulate why your topic is significant for the study of theology and/or the practice of ministry.

There will be 9 discussion starters due, worth up to 5 points each, and with an additional 5 points awarded for satisfactory submission of all nine mini-papers.

Group Project:

100 points

For the “mid-term,” students will work in groups, to create a class experiential exercise, which embodies the understandings of sin and grace reflected in the readings for one of the seminar days. Groups may elect to lead any group process— such as a ritual activity, educational lesson, or spiritual formation exercise, engaging the other class participants. The choice of format is up to the group members, but the content should demonstrate an awareness of the issues at stake in the readings and how they may be enacted in practice. In other words, your group activity would enact Augustinian understandings of sin and grace, for example, rather than your own. Your created activity should engage us for approximately 45 minutes. The group members will each receive a “common grade,” out of a possible 75 points, for their cooperative efforts.

In addition, you will submit a 5 page typewritten reflection paper upon the relevant assigned readings, (in addition to the regularly assigned discussion starter). This reflection should include a thoughtful discussion about the main themes in the readings and a consideration of the implications of the understanding of sin and grace at hand for the practice of ministry. In addition, please include a description of your emerging perspective on sin and grace, in relation to these particular texts. This is the place for you to name your opinion about Augustine (again, for example) and why you hold it. A good theological wrestling should include reference to readings, and to scripture, tradition, reason, and/or experience when naming your position. These individually written reflection papers will be worth up to 25 points.

Final Examination:

100 points

Students will write a 20 page theological essay, in the form of a solid research paper, on a specific theological question or issue surrounding sin and grace. You may elect to explore more deeply into the work of a particular theologian or tradition on sin and grace. Or, you may choose to study the understanding of sin and grace espoused by a theologian or tradition which we have not addressed in class. More broadly, you may consider how a number of theologians address a particular theological issue or question, such as the practice of homosexuality or ecological concerns, within the parameters of sin and grace. Whatever your approach, all papers should do the following:

* make reference to any assigned textbook readings obviously relevant to your chosen topic, **in addition** to utilizing at least **seven additional theological sources**. [General periodicals (ie *Time*) and random internet sites are **not** acceptable research venues for this project.]

*include a summary of the main arguments of your chosen sources, using *quotes* which identify key points and issues at stake for the various authors/articles

*discuss *why* these ideas or issues are significant for the topic at hand

*synthesize the arguments— compare/contrast the work of the various authors and consider how all their ideas relate to one another and to the topic being addressed

*respond to the arguments in the readings— [do you agree or disagree...why?]

*Name your theological position/perspective on sin and grace, with respect to your topic, and *why* you hold it, using scripture, tradition, reason, and/or your experience to support your understanding

* consider the pastoral ramifications of your perspective

*attend to grammar, punctuation, organization, and clarity of expression

Course Grading Scale:

A	93-100	Superior performance
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	
B	83-86	Good performance
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	
C	73-76	Adequate performance— accomplishing all set tasks, as assigned
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	
D	63-66	Poor performance
D-	60-62	
F	0- 59	Failing performance

Schedule of Assignments

Approaching Sin and Grace

Sept 26— Introductions...Get Acquainted and cover syllabus and course expectations.
Beginning explorations in Sin and Grace.

Oct 3 — Our Social Location and Experience

Read and be prepared to discuss Haight, 1-30, and Reader Article by Edwards.
Also read scriptures in Genesis 1-12, 15; Mark 5; John 9; and Romans 6-8.
Class Exercise naming our experiences of “sin and grace.”

Sin and Grace in Historical Perspective

Oct 10— Augustine: Grace and Human Autonomy

Read and prepare to discuss Haight, 32-51, and Reader article by Augustine.

Oct 17— Aquinas: Nature and Grace

Read and Prepare to Discuss Haight, 54-75, and Reader articles on
“Participation in God”

Oct 24— Luther: Sin and Grace

Read and Prepare to Discuss Haight, 79-101, and Reader articles by various
Protestant Reformers

***Group Presentation Day**

Oct 31— Catholic Responses to Reformation

Read and be prepared to discuss Haight, 105-138, and Reader articles

***Group Presentation Day**

Contemporary Theologies of Sin and Grace

Nov 7 — Universal Grace

Read and be prepared to discuss the book *If Grace Is True*, 1-199.

Nov 14— Healing Grace

Read and be prepared to discuss Nelson, 1-138.

Nov 21— Liberating Grace

Read and be prepared to discuss Haight, 143-160, and Sobrino vii-viii, 1-26,
47-101, and 173-185.

Nov 28— Social Grace

Read and be prepared to discuss Haight, 161-183, and Reader on McFague

Dec 5—8 Finals Week, Papers due at the latest by Noon on the 8th