

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY
SEATTLE UNIVERSITY
901 12TH AVENUE, P.O. BOX 222000
SEATTLE, WA 98122-1090

STMM 500.02 CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY
3 CREDITS

FALL QUARTER 2009
WEDNESDAYS, 5:45 – 8:35 P.M.
HUNTHAUSEN 100

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SYLLABUS

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Exploration from a Christian perspective of the mystery of human existence. Examination of the structures of human being: self-transcendence, finitude, freedom, destiny, relatedness, autonomy, growth, and history. Special attention to the horizons which shape human life, the roots of the possibility of religion, grace, and sin in the human.

II. S.T.M. LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THIS COURSE

This course primarily addresses the “theological” learning outcome put forward for the MAPS degree (and the corresponding learning outcome(s) for the MATS and M.Div. degrees):

- 1) An ability to reflect theologically on the basic themes of the Christian Tradition.

Secondarily, the following MAPS learning outcome is also addressed:

- 2) Knowledge of the interaction of religious/spiritual experience and culture in their ecumenical and multicultural dimensions.

III. COURSE OBJECTIVES

As a result of taking this course (if we have all been successful), each student will be able to demonstrate:

- 1) an understanding of essential elements in a Christian theological perspective on the human person, with a focus on
 - human creatureliness, abbreviated as embodiment and self-transcendence
 - sin and grace;
- 2) an understanding of methods of theological reflection as modeled by several contemporary theologians from diverse ecclesial traditions;
- 3) an ability to reflect upon self, nature, society, and God more appropriately and to carry out one's ministry more responsibly in light of this encounter with the Christian theological tradition;
- 4) an ability to express one's theological reflections insightfully and creatively both orally and in writing;
- 5) a sensitivity to the difference gender makes (and does not make) in human experience and to the ways race, class, and culture deepen and complicate accounts of human experience.

IV. TEXTS

Axel, Gabriel (writer and director; based on the story by Isak Dinesen).
"Babette's Feast." Panorama Film International, 1987.

LaCugna, Catherine (ed.). *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco 1993.

Plantinga, Cornelius. *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995.

Sachs, John. *The Christian Vision of Humanity*.
Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991.

Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology*, volume 1.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Williams, Delores. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995.

[Troyka, Lynn Quitman and Douglas Hesse. *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers*, 9th ed. Upper Saddle Brook, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009.]

V. SCHEDULE OF CLASS SESSIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

CLASS SESSION 1: SEPTEMBER 23

(THIS WEEK, MANY CHRISTIANS COMMEMORATE —
ST. MATTHEW, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST)

Getting Acquainted and Getting Oriented to Christian Anthropology

Introductions and Course Organization

What is Theology?

The Outlines of a Christian Perspective on the Human Person:
Creation, Sin, and Grace

CLASS SESSION 2: SEPTEMBER 30

(THIS WEEK — ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS)

Essential Elements in a Christian Perspective on the Human Person:

Creation in God's Image, Freedom, Individual in Community,

Male and Female, Body and Soul, Sin, Grace, Death, Resurrection,

Final Destiny, Christian Living

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, pp. 5-112

Reflection Paper Due

Be prepared to discuss your Reflection Paper.

CLASS SESSION 3: OCTOBER 7

(THIS WEEK — ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI, FRIAR, 1226)

God and the Polarities of Human Being

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, pp. 3-28, 163-210, 211-218,
235-261, 279-289

Focus Question: Consider the following sentence from p. 191 in Tillich's book: "Being-itself manifests itself to finite being in the infinite drive of the finite beyond itself." Which of Tillich's key points throughout the entire reading assignment does this one sentence name or summarize? Are there other key points not indicated by this sentence?

CLASS SESSION 4: OCTOBER 14

(THIS WEEK — ST. TERESA OF AVILA, NUN, 1582)

Sex, Gender, and Human Embodiment

Read and be prepared to discuss:

LaCugna, *Freeing Theology* pp. 1-4, 5-29, 115-137, 139-160,
185-209, 235-259

Focus Question: If you were to ask a "typical" member of your faith community to talk about the relationship between "salvation" and "the body," what would they say? What specific insights in LaCugna's book would be relevant to commending or reinforcing or challenging or correcting that "typical" view?

V. SCHEDULE OF CLASS SESSIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS (CONTINUED)

CLASS SESSION 5: OCTOBER 21

(THIS WEEK – ST. LUKE THE EVANGELIST)

A Second Look at God and Human Self-Transcendence/Embodiment

Re-read and be prepared to continue discussing Tillich and LaCugna

CLASS SESSION 6: OCTOBER 28

(THIS WEEK – ST. SIMON AND ST. JUDE, APOSTLES)

Doing Theology

Theological Analysis Paper Due

Be prepared to discuss your theological analysis paper.

Presentation by instructor on topic to be determined.

CLASS SESSION 7: NOVEMBER 4

(THIS WEEK – ALL SAINTS AND ALL FAITHFUL DEPARTED)

Sin and the Human Condition

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, pp. ix-xiv, 1-95, 129-149, 198-199; (in addition, skim one of the following chapters: 96-112 or 113-128 or 150-172 or 173-197)

Focus Question: Consider the following statement by Plantinga, on p. 89 of his book: "Good is original, independent, and constructive; evil is derivative, dependent, and destructive. To be successful, evil needs what it hijacks from goodness." Be prepared to explain this notion that evil is a parasite and compare/contrast it to the way the Christian concept of sin is portrayed in contemporary, "secular" media.

Bring "Scrapbooks"

NOVEMBER 11

(THIS WEEK – ST. MARTIN, BISHOP OF TOURS, 397)

No Class Session – Veteran's Day

CLASS SESSION 8: NOVEMBER 18

(THIS WEEK – HILDA, ABBESS OF WHITBY, 680)

Surrogacy and Survival

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, pp. ix-xvi, 1-139

Focus Question: On pp. 85-86 of her book, Williams gives a list of attitudes toward the colors white and black in American culture. She argues that the basic and frequent association of white with purity and goodness and black with dirtiness and evil provides the context for "white racial narcissism" and the treatment of African-Americans as inferior to European-Americans. Take a moment to look at Williams' list. Is she right? Can you think of cultural artifacts (movies, books, television shows, advertisements, music, art, etc.) that either support or refute Williams' view?

Bring "Scrapbooks"

V. SCHEDULE OF CLASS SESSIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS (CONTINUED)

NOVEMBER 25

(THIS WEEK – ST. CLEMENT, BISHOP OF ROME, C. 100)

No Class Session – Thanksgiving Recess

CLASS SESSION 9: DECEMBER 2

(THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT)

Grace Victorious

Theological Synthesis Paper Due

Watch and be prepared to discuss:

“Babette’s Feast,” written and directed by Gabriel Axel;
based on the story by Isak Dinesen [Karen Blixen].

Focus Questions: How would you characterize the Pastor’s view and practice of Christian faith? What view and practice of Christian faith is represented by Babette’s feast? Does Babette’s feast (on the occasion of what would have been the Pastor’s 100th birthday) represent a rejection of the Pastor’s life’s work? Its replacement? Its fulfillment?

Course Evaluation

VI. PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES FOR ASSIGNMENTS

A. ATTENDANCE. Class sessions are the primary means by which the instructor and students can share the material introduced in the assigned texts and other activities. Therefore, punctual attendance at all sessions of the course is essential.

B. READING, PREPARATION FOR CLASS SESSIONS, AND IN-CLASS PARTICIPATION. Each student is responsible for having read the material assigned for each session of the course and should be prepared to discuss their reading in class. Each student is also responsible for being an active participant in class sessions. Activities will include presentations by the instructor, large group discussions, and small group work.

C. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ALL WRITTEN WORK. First of all, please follow the required S.T.M. writing guide: Lynn Quitman Troyka and Douglas Hesse, *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers*, 9th ed. (Upper Saddle Brook, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009). Beyond these guidelines, be aware that I always look for a seemingly paradoxical combination of two factors in papers written for my S.T.M. courses.

On the one hand, I am hoping for you to put your own individual gifts and insights into words as creatively and winsomely as possible; I simply do not know how to create a checklist or set of guidelines to encourage you to be yourself. So, I will simply say: be yourself, let your papers express who you are!

VI. PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES FOR ASSIGNMENTS (CONTINUED)

On the other hand, I am hoping that any reasonably intelligent reader could pick up your paper at random – in the park or on the bus – and make sense of it. So, your written work does need to follow basic rules of good writing. A successful paper must:

- 1) advance a thesis – a basic point – that is easily identifiable, plausible, novel, compelling, insightful, and crystal clear [see Part One, Chapter 2 of *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers*];
- 2) display a structure or organization of materials that is solid, evident, understandable, and appropriate to your thesis – in particular, transitions from point to point must be smooth, each paragraph must have its own topic sentence, and all paragraphs must somehow advance your thesis [see Part One, Chapter 3 of *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers*];
- 3) make use of appropriate evidence to support your points – do not just make assertions, but offer your reader reasons why s/he should accept your assertions and, thereby, embrace your thesis (such evidence may come from other texts and artifacts, judiciously selected, as well as your own experience, carefully articulated) [see Part One, Chapters 4 and 5 of *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers*];
- 4) reflect sound argumentation – all ideas should flow together smoothly, you might anticipate and answer counterarguments to your thesis, as well as making novel connections to other experiences and ideas [see Part One, Chapters 4 and 5 of *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers*];
- 5) demonstrate good mechanics – sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, style of citation of sources, and spelling [see Parts Two through Five of *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers*, as needed, and make consistent use of one of the three style guides (MLA, APA, or Chicago) provided in Part Five, Chapters 34-36].

Papers should be “typed,” double-spaced, on standard 8½ x 11” paper. Use 1” margins all around (do not justify right margins); 12 pt. type. Staple the paper in the top left-hand corner. Please do not use plastic covers or binders. Keep a hard copy of your work – other than the one you hand in!

D. REFLECTION PAPER. Write a 300-word (one page, doubled-spaced, typed) response to each of the following three questions. Please write on three different ideas/topics/discussions!

1. What for you was the single most interesting or helpful idea/topic/discussion in Sachs’ book *The Christian Vision of Humanity*? Why?
2. What for you was the single most surprising idea/topic/discussion in Sachs’ book? Why?
3. What for you was the single most challenging or troubling idea/topic/discussion in Sachs’ book? (Not the most “difficult” to understand, but the substantive aspect of Sachs’ Christian anthropology that most challenges or troubles your current theological outlook.) Why?

VI. PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES FOR ASSIGNMENTS (CONTINUED)

Then, after answering these three questions, look at and reflect upon what you have written about Sachs' book. What do you observe in your responses? What do you learn about your own theological outlook? Explore your observations and learnings in a fourth 300-word (one page, double-spaced, typed) reflection.

This assignment is due at the beginning of class on **Wednesday, September 30**. We will use these reflections as the basis for our initial discussion that evening.

E. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS PAPER (HUMAN CREATURELINES: EMBODIMENT AND SELF-TRANSCENDENCE). In the assigned portions of his *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, Paul Tillich develops a view of the human person that turns on a series of polarities: individualization and participation, dynamics and form, freedom and destiny, finitude and infinity, and so on. An anthropology informed by feminist perspectives and commitments gets worked out in Catherine LaCugna's *Freeing Theology*, especially in the essays by Mary Aquin O'Neill and Susan A. Ross. Compare and contrast these two theological anthropologies on a carefully chosen and clearly defined aspect of what it means to be human.

I am not asking you whether you agree or disagree with the views of Tillich or of the contributors to LaCugna's book. I am asking you to demonstrate a thorough understanding of their views by analyzing them comparatively.

I would encourage you not to get stuck on obvious differences (for example, that Tillich, writing in the early 1950s, does not use inclusive language). Dig deeper into convergences and divergences between the two anthropologies. Wrestle with questions of this sort: How does Tillich understand human embodiment (even if he doesn't use that language) – a central theme for the contributors to LaCugna's book? Does the understanding of the human person developed by the contributors to LaCugna's book involve polarities, or a notion of self-transcendence, – as in Tillich's view?

Be sure to give good evidence both from *Systematic Theology* and *Freeing Theology* to support your interpretive conclusions.

Finally, I would encourage you to work toward a paper that is very tightly focused on the theological anthropologies expressed in the two books. In particular, try to avoid writing in your paper about the process you went through to get to and through the writing of the paper. Leave the process behind in your study/office; let that process, as important as it is, be the ladder or the path that delivered you to the conclusions about Tillich and LaCugna's book that do appear in the paper.

Your paper should be 7-10 typed, double-spaced pages in length and is due at the beginning of class on **Wednesday, October 28**.

VI. PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES FOR ASSIGNMENTS (CONTINUED)

F. “**SCRAPBOOK.**” In preparation to write your theological synthesis paper, you are invited to collect images, re-presentations, portrayals of the human person in contemporary culture; keep them for yourself and present them to others in a “scrapbook”; and reflect upon them in light of the issues of this course, paying special attention to the values your images express. The goal of this activity is for each member of the class to bring in for our consideration and discussion as many pieces of relevant evidence as possible toward an answer to the question: How does American society in 2009 understand and convey what it means to be a human person?

The word “image” probably suggests a visual image – but don’t understand it that narrowly. For the purpose of this assignment, an “image” of the human person could be found in: a full page photographic advertisement in a magazine; the lyrics to a pop song; an interview with a professional athlete; a sermon by a priest or minister; a chapter in a novel; a scene from a movie; etc., etc., etc. This assignment is not meant to impose an additional activity on you beyond what you already do in your daily life. Just keep your eyes and ears and mind and heart open as you listen to the radio, watch television, rent videos, go to the movies, read/look at magazines, billboards and other advertisements, visit websites; always be on the lookout for images, re-presentations, portrayals of the human person in contemporary society.

You are invited to collect “images,” keeping and presenting them in one of a variety of forms: a scrapbook, a journal, a poster, a PowerPoint or multimedia presentation – I am going to refer to all of them as a “scrapbook.” If you can’t actually cut out or photocopy or download or otherwise reproduce your images (for example, if you want to “collect” a scene from a movie or a chapter from a novel), then write up a brief description of it. Video and audio images are perfectly acceptable. Be as creative as possible. Please keep track of the source of each of your images (typical bibliographic citations for books, magazines, movies, CDs; dates and titles and channels or networks for radio or television broadcasts; and so on). I would encourage you to collect as many images as you have time and energy for; try, as a minimum, to have several images for at least three of the five topics listed below. You may find one of these topics more interesting or important than the others – please go with it! As you “live with” and reflect on your collection of images, assess how the human person is being presented in your images, the values in American society and culture your images express, and your personal reaction/response to the images.

Be prepared to present the best material from your “scrapbook” in class on Wednesday, November 4 and 18.

Topic One: Watch for, collect, and reflect upon “images” of the human body in contemporary culture.

Topic Two: “Images” of sex/gender (male, female, and other; masculine, feminine, other) in contemporary culture.

VI. PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES FOR ASSIGNMENTS (CONTINUED)

Topic Three: “Images” of the human person that relate to the human mind or soul or spirit (mental health, therapy, counseling, anti-depressant drugs, human self-transcendence, spirituality etc.,) in other words, the human person as an intellectual or psychological or spiritual being.

Topic Four: “Images” of the human person as creator and consumer of technology.

Topic Five: “Images” that present the human person as a social, political, economic being, that is, the human person as involved in systems of wealth and poverty, power and marginality, justice and oppression.

Completed “scrapbooks” will be turned in to the instructor on **December 2**, along with your Theological Synthesis Papers.

G. THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS PAPER (SIN AND GRACE). Drawing on material from your “scrapbook” and integrating insights from at least one of our final three texts (Cornelius Plantinga’s *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*, Delores Williams’ *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Gabriel Axel’s “Babette’s Feast”), your assignment is to articulate, develop, and defend your own Christian/theological anthropology. In other words, take a stand on the question: What does it mean from the perspective of Christian/religious faith, especially in light of the concepts of sin and grace, to be a human person?

Is that open-ended enough for you? I hope so. The point of this paper is for you to do some theologizing of your own (as opposed to writing on someone else’s theology, as you did in the theological analysis paper).

But now, we need to limit this global task in three ways to make it do-able over the next few weeks within a relatively short paper.

1. You can’t possibly talk about what it means to be a human person in its entirety. Remember, I took Sachs 112 pages just to give a brief overview of the subject matter! So, you need to limit yourself to a specific theme or concept or issue within Christian/theological anthropology. If a topic hasn’t already found you during the quarter, you might go back to Sachs’ table of contents as a reminder of some traditional topics. Or, you might ask which of the five topics from the “scrapbook” assignment (body; sex/gender; human person as intellectual/psychological/spiritual; human person and technology; human person as social, political, economic being) made the biggest impression on you. From there you might move to specific anthropological themes/concepts/issues such as: love, hate, abandonment, pain, pleasure, sickness, suffering, death, ecstasy, wholeness, healing, beauty, food, blood, tears, visions, madness, self-sacrifice, self-absorption, power and powerlessness, etc., etc., etc. These examples came off the top of my head – use them to stimulate your own creativity! Please consider the concepts of sin and grace to be the heart of this assignment.

VI. PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES FOR ASSIGNMENTS (CONTINUED)

2. Your theological stance needs to develop in dialogue with contemporary American cultural assumptions about what it means to be human. Hence the inclusion of material from your “scrapbook.”
3. Your theological stance needs to show the impact of our work together in the course – specifically, the final three textbooks that all wrestled somehow with sin and grace. So, be sure in your paper to convince me that you have read and understood at least one of them. However, I do not want a summary of one of those books; I want you to make use of some substantial argument, point, discussion, or insight in (at least) one of them.

This paper should be 7-10 typed, double-spaced pages in length and is due at the beginning of class on **Wednesday, December 2**.

VII. COMPUTATION OF FINAL GRADE

Class Attendance, Preparation, and Participation	30 points
Scrapbook	30
Reflection Paper	40
Theological Analysis Paper	100
Theological Synthesis Paper	100
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TOTAL	300 points

Final letter grades for the course will be close to the following scale:

A	=	280-300 points
A-	=	270-279
B+	=	264-269
B	=	246-263
B-	=	240-245
C+	=	234-239

and so on.