

THEO 7019
Fall 2019
Mark Massa, S.J.
Thursdays, 3 to 5:25
24 Quincy Road, Room 101 (Boisi Center, Seminar Room)

Classic Texts in American Theology

Class Meetings

This is a graduate seminar focused on classic texts in American theology—texts that every person working in an American theological environment should know. Precisely because of the seminar format, everyone will be expected to both “prepare” the texts before the class meetings, and to take turns convening the discussions. By preparing the texts I mean a careful reading of the assigned works (so that all of us arrive at our seminar meetings with questions/insights), and some willingness to engage each other’s interpretation of the texts (yes, mine too). I will convene the first three seminar meetings, to model what I have in mind about the business of “convening” (something which, whatever your future life path, you’ll be doing the rest of your lives); then each of you will have a hand running a few of them.

Required Readings

Jonathan Edwards, “Treatise on the Religious Affections,” H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*; William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*; Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*; Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*; J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*; James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*; Mordecai Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization*; John Courtney Murray, *We Hold these Truths*; David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*; Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*; James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*

Requirements

- 1) Attendance at all seminar meetings, save for near-death experiences. Likewise, everyone is expected to have prepared the texts before class, and to engage in the general discussion. Everyone, however, will be allowed one “bad hair day” during the course of the semester—a revered tradition begun by William James at Harvard in the 19th century. Just let me know if it is *your* bad hair day before class begins.
- 2) Convening at least one seminar meeting during the course of the semester. I encourage you to stop by and chat with me before you convene a class meeting. As I presuppose that this will be a new experience for some of you, this will not be graded activity.
- 3) Four critical essays (4-5 pages) on assigned texts. You will receive questions for these essays in class the week before they are due. I’m always happy to read your drafts without prejudice to the grade.
- 4) A 15 to 20-page historiographic seminar paper, due by 5 pm on December 12. This paper will explore a school of thought or theological tradition that emerged from one of the texts which we’ve read (e.g., feminist theology in which Johnson plays a major role, American Catholic theology after David Tracy, etc.). We’ll be talking a great deal about this, so don’t worry if you haven’t done this before.

Evaluation

The three critical essays (minus the lowest grade) count for 50% of the final grade. The seminar paper counts for the other 50% of the final grade. Your class performance and skill at convening seminar meetings will not be graded, as these fall under the broad category of “coerced activity.”

Office Hours

I’ll be open for business on Mondays from 1pm – 3pm in my Theology Department office (Stokes N431), and on Thursdays from 1pm until class in my Boisi Center office. But please feel free to contact me anytime if you need to meet with me other than during those times (mark.massa@bc.edu).

Disability Services:

If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan (kathleen.duggan@bc.edu) at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD; or Rory Stein (rory.stein@bc.edu) in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities, including temporary disabilities. Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.

Academic Integrity:

It is your responsibility to understand the university’s policy, posted at www.bc.edu/integrity. Violations of academic integrity will be reported to the appropriate dean and judged by the academic integrity committee in your school. If you are found responsible for violating the policy, penalties may include a failing grade, probation, suspension, or expulsion, depending on the seriousness and circumstances.

Schedule of Class Meetings and Readings

A. Paradigmatic Works

August 29: The emergence of a distinctively “American Theology”:

I. Experience: “Just Do It!”

Jonathan Edwards and the Experiential Basis for Theology

Reading: Edwards, “Treatise on the Religious Affections”

Massa convening

September 5: Varieties of Religious Experience:

II. Pluralism: “Under the Surface Manyness Lies a Vast Pool of Manyness”

Niebuhr and the Tradition of Pluralistic Models

Reading: H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*

Massa convening

September 12: Varieties of Religious Experience II:

III. Pragmatism” “The truth always works”

William James and the Pragmatic Nature of American Theology

Reading: William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*
Massa convening

**Critical Essay Number 1 on William James Due

B. The “Great Tradition” in American Protestant Theology

September 19: The Social Gospel and Structural Sin

Rauschenbusch and the Progressive Mainstream

Reading: Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*
Student convening

September 26: Christian Realism: “No” to Barth, “Yes” to Sin

The Fruition of the Social Gospel

Reading: Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*
Student convening

October 3: The Birth of Fundamentalism: A Militant “No” to Liberalism in all of its forms

Reading: J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*

Student convening

** Critical Essay Number 2 due on Reinhold Niebuhr

October 10: Liberation Theology in North America: Marxism, Oppression, and the Church

Reading: James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*

Student convening

C. Four Answers to the American Circumstance: Old Faiths in a New Land

October 17: The Old and the New Israel

The Chosen People in the “Almost Chosen Nation”

Reading: Mordecai Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization*

Student convening

October 24: Natural Law as Bridge Between Rome and America

Reading: John Courtney Murray, *We Hold these Truths*

Student convening

**Critical essay Number 3 due on Mordecai Kaplan

October 31: Pluralism as a (Catholic) Theological Virtue:

David Tracy and Pre-conceptual Languages

Reading: David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*

Massa (probably) convening

November 7: Individual meetings with Massa (sign up)
***Description and initial bibliography for seminar paper due.**

November 14: Thomism and Feminism as Allies
A Catholic Call for a “Larger” God
Reading: Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*
Massa (probably) convening

D. The Challenge of Post-Modernism

November 21: Being PoMo (And All That)
Well Beyond Biblical Literalism
Reading: James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*
Massa convening

December 5: Reports from the Field (That Is, You!)

*****Seminar paper due by 5 pm on December 12 *******