STMM 503
THEOLOGY IN AN ECUMENICAL CONTEXT

School of Theology and Ministry
Seattle University
Spring Quarter, 2013

Professors

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Course Information

Day and time: Monday, 5:45-8:35 p.m.
Place: HUNT 100
First day of class: April 1
Holiday: May 27 (Memorial Day)
Last day of class: June 10

Course Description

This course is designed to help you, students, think theologically–that is, to understand more fully the Christian faith and the church that confesses it and to reflect critically on this faith in light of contemporary issues–not only as members of particular church traditions but as members of the one, universal church of Jesus Christ. To this end, the course includes 1) an introduction to Christianity's major theological traditions, 2) an opportunity to explore your own ecclesial (church) tradition as part of the larger body, 3) an introduction to ecumenical dialogue and to several significant theological texts that have resulted from it, and 4) an introduction to interfaith relations. Running throughout the quarter will be opportunities to think theologically about pressing issues of the day, including war, poverty, and environmental destruction.

Implicit in this syllabus are several assumptions held by us, the professors, in this course–assumptions that are also part of the very "fabric" of STM:

- Theology matters. The way we think about the Christian faith helps shape the way we act as followers of Christ.

- Church matters. Indeed, "individual Christian" is an oxymoron since to be a Christian is to be incorporated into a community greater than the sum of its parts. For all of its

weaknesses, the church is the context within which Christians live out their calling to love God and neighbor.

- The church is inherently one. Division between denominations not only contradicts the church's witness to the reconciling love of God, it is a denial of the church's very nature as set forth in scripture. In Christ, those who have been estranged–Jew and Gentile, black and white, Russian and American, gay and straight, Catholic and Protestant–are offered the gift of new community. The task of what is called the ecumenical movement is to help the church receive this gift.

- The one church is wondrously diverse. This "ecumenical" (united, inclusive, universal) community is historically manifest in various particular communities, each of which may have gifts important for the whole body. The ecumenical movement does not seek to eliminate these diverse theological traditions, but to help us see them as adjectives rather than nouns. Properly speaking, we are not Lutherans or Catholics, but Lutheran Christians and Catholic Christians.

- The church is simultaneously local and universal. Each congregation or parish in which Christ dwells by faith is truly the church–but not the whole of it. Because the body is interdependent, what happens in Manila or Ramallah or Caracas happens to us in Seattle, and vice versa. As the bumper sticker puts it, Christian faith must "think globally and act locally."

- The church is, by its very nature, missionary. It is sent by God to serve the world God so loves and to be a witness to God's promised Reign. This means that theology, even when dealing with what seem to be issues internal to the church, is always oriented toward the world.

- Christians, while called to proclaim the redemptive love we have known in Jesus Christ, are by no means the whole of God's people. Scripture and experience both tell us that God is known, worshiped, and followed by persons of other faiths. As the world has become "smaller," our relationship with interfaith neighbors has become a most important theme for Christian theology.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you should

- know more about your own church and its theological tradition;
- know more about a variety of other ecclesial traditions;
- have more extensive knowledge of–and, hopefully, appreciation for–one tradition that is not your own;
- know more about the modern ecumenical movement, including several of its key theological texts;

- have a greater appreciation for the diversity of theological voices from the global church;
- have an understanding of the purpose and practice of ecumenical dialogue;
- have a better understanding of the issues involved in interfaith relations;
- have a better understanding of how the church has responded to major issues of the day, including war, poverty, and environmental destruction;
- be better able to think theologically (i.e., to make and analyze arguments on the basis of such sources as scripture, tradition and experience).

We also hope that you will have a better understanding of the assumptions listed above and an appreciation for them!

Required Texts

Ted A. Campbell, Christian Confessions: A Historical Introduction

"Theology in an Ecumenical Context" Course Pack

Schedule of Class Sessions and Assignments

April 1 **Defining Terms**: **Theology, Ecumenical, and an Ecumenical School of Theology**

Campbell, pp. 1-17.
Course Pack readings 1 (Michael Kinnamon), 2 (Desmond Tutu), 3 (Elsa Tamez), and 4 (Phyllis Anderson).

THE DIVERSITY OF THE CHURCH

April 8 **The Orthodox Theological Tradition**

Campbell, pp. 19-61.
Course Pack readings 5 (Paulos Mar Gregorios) and 6 (John Zizioulas).

April 15 **The Catholic Theological Tradition**

Campbell, pp. 65-112.
Course Pack readings 7 (Pope John Paul II) and 8 (Ivone Gebara).

April 22 **The Reformation Theological Tradition**

Campbell, pp. 115-183.
Course Pack readings 9 (Letty Russell), 10 (The Book of Concord), and 11 (Eric Gritsch and Robert Jensen).

April 29 **The Evangelical and Free Theological Tradition**

Campbell, pp. 185-256.
Course Pack readings 12 (Philip Potter) and 13 (Martin Luther King, Jr.).

May 6 **The Church in Diverse Cultures**

Course Pack readings 14 (Wonsuk Ma), 15 (Mary Sawyer), 16 (Sandra Beardsall), 17 (Mercy Amba Oduyoye), and 18 (Chung Hyun Kyung).

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

May 13 **Convergence on Ecclesiology and Gospel**

Campbell, pp. 257-278.
Course Pack readings 19 (Kinnamon), 20 ("Called to Be the One Church"), 21 ("Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification"), and 22 ("A Common Account of Hope").

May 20 **Convergence on Sacraments and Ministry**

Campbell, pp. 278-290.
World Council of Churches, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (available online).

May 27 No Class - Memorial Day

June 3 **Convergence on the Church in the Modern World**

Course Pack readings 23 (Gaudium et Spes), 24 (Alexander Schmemann), 5 (Patriarch Bartholomew), 26 ("An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace"), and 27 ("A Social Creed for the 21st Century").

June 10 **The Ecumenical Church in an Interfaith World**

Course Pack readings 28 (Trice), 29 (Eck), 30 (Kinnamon), 31 ("Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World"), and 32 ("A Common Word between Us and You").

Course Requirements

1. To read carefully all of the assigned materials, in advance of the class when they are discussed, and participate fully and regularly in class discussions. Since absence and tardiness diminish your participation in class and impoverish the learning experience of others, they will negatively affect this part of your grade.

2. To write a short (5-7 pp.) paper that addresses the following question: How does your denomination (e.g., the United Methodist Church) or ecclesial tradition (e.g., Methodist) understand and respond to the problem of war in human society? This question obviously gives rise to other more specific ones: What has your church said theologically about war and peace? Has it, for example, endorsed a position of "just war" or pacifism? To what sources (e.g., scripture, tradition, experience) does your church appeal when speaking theologically about this (or any) subject? How are decisions made about what guidance to give church members in times of war? For example, does your church pass resolutions or produce study materials? If so, what authority do they have for congregations/parishes and individuals? Do your church's worship materials or hymnody reflect any particular understanding of war and peace? Your papers should be based on an examination of denominational documents and, if at all possible, on phone or in-person interviews with local, regional, or national church leaders. Your own experience also counts, but it needs to be reinforced by other sources. And please keep in mind that the focus of the paper is on what your denomination or ecclesial tradition has to say about this issue. **This paper is due in class on April 22.**

3. To write a short (5-7 pp.) paper that addresses the following question: How does a church tradition other than your own understand and practice the Eucharist/Lord's Supper/Holy Communion? You can choose the tradition you wish to explore, but please choose one that is substantially different from that in which you now worship. How does this other tradition understand the Eucharist theologically? How does this affect its practice of the sacrament? How is the Eucharist related to the mission of the church in the world? How do this other tradition's understanding and practice of the Eucharist differ from those of your own church? What about the other's understanding or practice leaves you with a "holy envy" (i.e., with a deep sense of appreciation, even a desire to see it incorporated into the life of your own church)? **This paper is due in class on May 13.**

4. To contribute fully to the writing of a slightly longer (8-10 pp.) paper that offers a constructive theological position in response to the following question: How <u>should</u> the church understand and address the issue of poverty in the contemporary world, including the disparity between rich and poor? This paper will be written in small groups of 4-5 persons, assigned by the professors. Since one grade will be given for each group paper (i.e., each group participant will receive the grade given for the paper), you will need to work well together in order to produce the best possible theological statement. The papers should offer a definition of poverty and how it is/

should be understood theologically, drawing on sources you clearly identify (e.g., scripture, tradition, social analysis, personal experience). What course of action would your group like to see implemented by the church ecumenically? How should the ecumenical church relate to interfaith neighbors when dealing with this issue? The papers will, hopefully, reveal a considerable area of consensus; but where you don't have consensus, clearly identify the areas of continuing theological disagreement. **The papers are due in class on June 10.** On that day, each group will briefly present the statement it has produced, and each of you will be asked a say a brief word about how the course, and the experience of working together, has affected your sense of church.

5. To participate fully in an "ecumenical dialogue" dealing either with the issue of war/ peace or the Eucharist. To be more specific, on both April 22 and 29, 4-5 persons will engage in dialogue on the topic of war and peace, starting from questions given by the professors. You will, of course, be speaking not as individuals but as representatives of your church traditions, drawing on the research done for your papers. On May 13 and 20, the process will be repeated with the focus of the dialogues being the Eucharist and each participant representing the church tradition she or he chose to investigate. You will take part in only one dialogue group, which means that half the class will engage in dialogue on war and half on the Eucharist. A schedule indicating when each of you will be a dialogue participant will be distributed early in the course. It goes without saying that those who are not directly involved in a particular dialogue are expected to be very interested observers, learning from the work of your colleagues.

Grading

- **Participation in the course, including full participation in the ecumenical dialogue, will count for 25% of the final grade.** This is, admittedly, a somewhat subjective evaluation. We, the professors, will be attentive to the quality and frequency of your contributions to class discussion (dominating a discussion is little better than not saying anything!), the way you engage in your assigned public dialogue (i.e., Can you represent your own or another tradition in verbal give and take?), and whether or not you listen carefully when others are speaking.

- **Each of the papers will also count for 25% of the final grade**. We will take several factors into account, including the extent and quality of your research, your fidelity to the assignment (i.e., Have you answered the question?), the overall quality of your writing (i.e., your spelling, grammar, sentence structure, and so forth), and the depth of your insights. The corporate paper will require less research than the other two, but more creative reflection–as a group.

The policies of Seattle University, including the policy regarding academic honesty, obviously apply to this course. Please consult the Seattle University Handbook for details.