

### **COURSE 3: GRIFFITH, FOUNDATIONS OF THEOLOGY**

#### **Report:**

Dear AAAS/Science for Seminaries,

What a wonderful experience it was to bring neuroscience into my Foundations of Theology class in the fall of 2021. This was a graduate course taught for beginning MA students in Theology and Ministry, who little formal background in theology, and I have the good pleasure of teaching it frequently. I have sent in the Syllabus for the 2020 version of the Course, highlighting two segments of it impacted by dialogue with neuroscience and the help of two outstanding people in this field. The two areas of the course that were particularly conducive for this kind of exchange were the units on *theological anthropology* and the week given to *spirituality and discipleship*, which places keen emphasis on the realm of practice.

Of particular interest to students was the relationship between “body” and “soul” – what theologians had to say about this when construing the human and what neuroscientists had to contribute to such a discussion. Grasping that things attributed to a “soul” realm had a biological basis, the matter of “non-reductive materialism” and a monistic presentation of the human person became all more comprehensible and exciting for the students, particularly in their conversation with Dr. Warren Brown. Through my own preparation for that segment of the course I was able to expose them additionally to the insights of Nancey Murphy, Stewart Goetz, John Cooper, and Malcolm Jeeves. Further on in the course we were able to discuss the effects of spiritual practices on the brain/body with the help of Bill Roozeboom’s book. All of it was exciting and fresh for our students, and the interdisciplinarity of these class days added much to their learning as theology students.

I myself continue to read in the area of theology and neuroscience stimulated by what the grant inspired. I no longer can imagine a conceptually adequate theological anthropology unit today that would be without the findings of and questions posed by neuroscientists. A reductive materialism still does not provide adequate responses to questions about phenomenal consciousness. But a multidimensional monism that incorporates a non-reductive physicalism and emergence holds much promise for theological anthropology. I continue to immerse myself as a theological educator in these discussions. Beyond the realm of theology and neuroscience, I now feel that more dialogue between science and theology is needed in my theology of creation segment of this course, as such a dialogue will prove the most effective way of addressing the serious environmental issues that are ours today.

It has been a pleasure and an opportunity for considerable new learning to be part of this initiative. In their course evaluations, the students in this course specifically noted their gratitude for the theology and science elements in the course.

Sincerely,

Colleen M. Griffith

School of Theology and Ministry

Boston College

Syllabus

## **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS IN PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Dr. Colleen M. Griffith

Fall Semester, 2019 - 2020

School of Theology and Ministry, Boston College

TMST 7057

Room 135, 9 Lake St.

Thursdays, 9:30 – 11:50 a.m.

STM, Boston College

### **Description**

An introduction to the foundational elements of Christian theology presented in practical perspective. Together we will consider theological methods, examine the sources contributing to theological positions, and explore foundational understandings of God, Christ, the human, the church and the world.

### **Required Texts**

Schussler Fiorenza and Galvin, eds. Systematic Theology. 2nd edition.

Elizabeth A. Johnson, Quest for the Living God

Terrence W. Tilley, Faith: What it Is and What it Isn't

Pope Francis, Laudato Si

Selected Readings: Online Course Reserves

### **Course Requirements**

1. Punctual attendance, active participation in class and engagement with assigned readings.
2. Option of one of the following:
  - (1) Five three page essays (double spaced)  
These essays are written in response to weekly assignments

drawn from readings and class presentations. Students will choose one of two assigned questions every two week segment of the course. Essays are due the following week. At the end of the semester, each student will have completed five short essays.

OR

- (2) Two short essays (double-spaced) and a 12-15 page research paper.  
The research paper topic is chosen in consultation with the professor. This paper should contain a clear thesis statement, a discussion of theological research pertaining to one's proposal, and a presentation of the practical significance of one's proposal. Please consult the Chicago Manual of Style in preparing this research paper. An outline and preliminary bibliography for this paper is due on Tuesday, October 30. The final paper is due on Tuesday, November 27th.
3. A final exam on December 5<sup>th</sup>.

All written work for the course should be double spaced with one-inch margins and 12 font. Written work should demonstrate clear organizational structuring of ideas, thoughtful engagement with reading materials, and attention to basic grammar, spelling, punctuation and style. In the short critical essays assigned, students will be asked to summarize theological material, analyze it, and envision what constructive appropriation of it entails. Evaluation will be based upon

**1.) comprehension of textual materials, 2.) ability to analyze theological positions, and 3.) capacity to think critically and constructively about the fruitfulness of theological ideas.**

\*Late papers will be accepted but will start with a grade of A-. Please submit all papers in hard copy.

### **Course Objectives**

As a result of this course, a student will be able to

- 1.) demonstrate a strong theological vocabulary,
- 2.) articulate sources that contribute to specific theological positions,
- 3.) understand the foundational building blocks of Christian theology, and
- 4.) engage core Christian theological constructs in pastoral/practical perspective.

### **Contact Information and Office Hours**

STM Main Number – (617) 552-8440

Prof. Griffith's Voicemail – (617) 552-8444; email- [griffc@bc.edu](mailto:griffc@bc.edu)

Office Hours - Tuesday mornings, 9:45 – 11:00 a.m. by appointment or as arranged with professor

TA – Paul Melley; email – [melleypa@bc.edu](mailto:melleypa@bc.edu)

### **Course Evaluation**

Course assignments are conceived with course objectives in mind. Evaluation for the course is based upon short critical essays (70%), final exam (20%), and oral class participation (10%).

## **STM Grading Policy**

### **A**

This is the highest grade awarded for individual assignments, and for a course as a whole. "A" indicates that a student's work not only meets, but exceeds the requirements specified for an assignment, and does so in an exemplary manner. As such it should be rare and granted for exemplary work. The outstanding quality of the work includes, but is not limited to, evidence of breadth and depth in reading, insightful engagement with primary and secondary sources, and a well-constructed argument that is creative in its analysis and, where appropriate, underscores the pastoral implications of a topic. To receive an "A," the assignment would be written in a way that is concise and compelling, while also conforming to accepted academic methodologies for the citation of sources.

**A-** This grade indicates that the work significantly exceeds the standards for a "B." The professor's comments will identify the area/s in which the assignment significantly exceeds the standards, such as its argument, methodology, range of reading, or its structure/expression.

**B+** This grade indicates that the work exceeds the standards for a "B." The professor's comments will identify both what aspect/-s of the paper went beyond "B" and what would have enhanced the paper's argument or presentation.

**B** This grade indicates that the assignment satisfies requirements specified for the particular task and does so in a competent manner; as such, the work meets expectations at the graduate level. As such it should be seen as the standard grade for satisfactory completion. "B" confirms that an assignment demonstrates a sound understanding of relevant material, is constructed coherently, and communicates ideas in a clear and accessible manner, while also being properly attentive to the norms governing the citation of references. While the B grade recognizes competency in the area covered by the assignment, the grade also suggests that greater breadth or depth was possible in fulfilling the assignment; this implies, for example, the need for wider or deeper reading, a better sequencing of ideas, or greater attentiveness to written expression in order to enhance clarity.

**B-** This grade indicates that the work approaches the standards for a "B," but does not fulfill all the requirements of that grade. The professor's comments will indicate whether the deficit resides in one particular aspect of the paper—ideas, methodology, works consulted, or its structure/expression—or whether more than one aspect of the paper fell below the standard for a higher grade.

**C+** This grade indicates that the work significantly fails to meet the standards for a B," but is more than marginally acceptable. The professor's comments will identify both what aspect/-s of the paper were insufficient and what would have enhanced the paper's argument or presentation.

**C** This grade applies to work that is no more than marginally acceptable at the graduate level. The grade makes clear that the work does not rise to the level of competency in the topic covered by the assignment; the deficits could be in any or all of the work's ideas, research, methodology, or structure/expression. "C" indicates that satisfactory completion of the course will require significant improvement in the areas specified by the professor's comments.

**E** An assignment that receives this grade is unsatisfactory in all of the areas that demonstrate competency for a graduate student. There are no other gradations between C and F. All work below C is unsatisfactory.

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY**

*Plagiarism* is the act of taking the words, ideas, data, illustrations, or statements of another person or source, and presenting them as one's own. Penalties at Boston College range from a grade penalty to dismissal from the University. To avoid plagiarism, any use of another's words or ideas must be fully cited. If in the original wording, quotation marks or blocked, indented quotations must be used. For more information regarding academic integrity, please consult the STM website at

<http://www.be.edu/content/bc/schools/stm/acadprog/stmserv/acadpol.html>.

## **FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

If you have a disability and will be requesting accommodations for this course, register with Kathy Duggan ([Kathleen.duggan@bc.edu](mailto:Kathleen.duggan@bc.edu)) Associate Director, Academic Support Services, or Paulette Durrett ([paulette.durrett@bc.edu](mailto:paulette.durrett@bc.edu)), Assistant Dean for Students with Disabilities. Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Students absent from class for more than two sessions during a semester are subject to grade docking of 1/3 letter grade for each class session missed, beginning with the third class missed.

## **WRITING COMPANIONS CORNER**

The STM Writing Companions Corner (WCC) offers students one-on-one help with writing research papers, exegeses, reflection papers, and other assignments frequently given by STM faculty. Please watch *STM News* for more information on signing up for an appointment in the WCC.

## **BIAS NEUTRAL AND INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE**

Language is not fixed or static, but is constantly evolving and changing as society's attitudes and practices change. Be aware of the development of new forms of expression that endeavor to describe persons in non-discriminatory ways that are appropriate, respectful and just. In accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style and generally accepted contemporary canons of scholarship, the expectation is to use bias neutral language in academic writing. In addition to gender inclusive language, conscientious effort should be made to use appropriate language with reference to race, ethnicity, disability, age, religion, social status, etc.

## **COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS**

### **August 29: Introduction to Theology and Theological Method in Practical**

#### **Perspective**

Miroslav Volf, "Theology for a Way of Life," in Practicing Theology:

Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life, 245-263.

Francis Schussler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Tasks and Methods," ST,

50-64.

### **September 5: Revelation and Faith**

Avery Dulles, "Faith and Revelation" in ST, 80-89.

Terrence Tilley, Faith: What it Is and What it Isn't

**September 12: Scripture and Tradition**

Avery Dulles, "Faith and Revelation" in ST, 99-105.

Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, Chpts. 4 and 5.

Anthony Godzieba, "And Followed Him on the Way: Unity, Diversity, Discipleship," in *Beyond Dogmatism and Innocence: Hermeneutics, Critique, and Catholic Tradition*, eds. Bradford Hinze and Anthony Godzieba, 228-254.

**September 19: The Christian Concept of God**

Elizabeth A. Johnson, Quest for the Living God, chpts. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7.

James H. Cone, "God is Black" in Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside, eds. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, 101-114.

**September 26: The Mystery of a Triune God**

Anthony J. Godzieba, "The Trinitarian Mystery of God: A 'Theological Theology'" in ST, 132-196.

Elizabeth A. Johnson, Quest for the Living God, chpts. 9 and 10.

**October 3: A Theology of Creation**

Anne M. Clifford, "Creation," in ST, 202-250.

Pope Francis, Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home

**October 10: Foundational Christology**

*Gospel of Luke*

John P. Galvin, "Jesus Christ," in ST, 256-287.

**October 17: Theological Interpretations of Jesus' Death and Resurrection**

Elizabeth A. Johnson, Quest for the Living God, chpt. 3

John P. Galvin, "Jesus Christ" in ST, 287-312.

**October 24: Theological Anthropology: Traditional Poles**

Roger Haight, "Sin and Grace" in ST, 377-429.

David Kelsey, "The Ultimate Context into Which We are Born" in Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology, vol. I, 160-175.

**October 31: Theological Anthropology: Contemporary Considerations**

Warren Brown, "Neurobiological Embodiment of Spirituality and Soul" in From Cells to Souls – and Beyond, ed. Malcolm Jeeves, 58-76.

E. Johnson, C. Griffith, S. Butler, "Embodiment: Women and Men, Equal or Complementary?" in The Church Women Want, 35-67.

Roberto Goizueta, "Nosotros," in Caminemos Con Jesus: Toward A Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment, 47-76.

M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, selected chapters.

**November 7: The Church and the Communion of Saints**

Michael Fahey, "Church," in ST, 317-368.

Richard Gaillardetz, "Power and Authority in the Church: Emerging Issues" In A Church With Open Doors, ed. Gaillardetz, 87-111.

Richard Lennan, "The Church as Sacrament of Hope" *Theological Studies* (June, 2011).

Elizabeth Johnson, "The Communion of Saints and Mary," in ST, 431-458.

**November 14: Spirituality and Discipleship**

Philip Sheldrake, "Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly," in Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality, ed. E. Dryer, 282-298.

Elizabeth Liebert, The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making, chpts. 1 and 2.

Maria Clara Bingemer, "Mysticism with Open Eyes," in *Witnessing: Prophecy, Politics, and Wisdom*, eds. Maria Clara Bingemer and Peter Casarella, 1-12.

Dean Blevins, "Neuroscience and Christian Worship: Practices that Change The Brain," in *Neuroscience and Christian Formation*, eds. Mark Maddix and Dean Blevins. 99-109.

**November 21: Eschatology**

Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "Eschatology," in *ST*, 622 – 651.

**December 5 : Final Exam**