

**THLE 520 E-1 Systematic Theology and Ethics:
Vision of Community**

Palmer Theological Seminary and College
Of Eastern University
Fall 2021, McInnis Hall 253

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Description: This course probes several major themes in Systematic Theology with the intention of cultivating the students' abilities to think deeply and carefully about their beliefs. Dialogue with Christians past and present, from the Mediterranean basin to global points of view is an essential ingredient in this process. Another critical component engages the ethical implications of Christian theology. Doctrinal foci will be

- Scripture: message about the vision
- Trinity: vision of community
- Creation: incarnation of the vision
- Anthropology: partners in the vision
- Sin: challenge to the vision
- Grace: fulfillment of the vision

In all, the course attends to the students' abilities to think critically about and articulate and apply their theology and ethics clearly and cogently to life and ministry.

Prerequisites: a. THLE 510 Theology and Ethics of Congregational Life;
b. One graduate course in Bible.

Teaching and Learning Strategies: The professor facilitates student achievement of desired learning outcomes through reading assignments, integrated media, lectures, discussions and learning-centered exercises.

Anticipated Learning Outcomes: that students will

- *develop skills* for continually refining and more clearly expressing their theology while *fairly handling sources*
- *practice and deepen facility* for reflecting meaningfully on the experiences of life and professional ministry in dialogue with the student's theology
- *Interrogate* historic Christian beliefs *via* contemporary knowledge in order to *become more adept* at clearly addressing currently meaningful questions about doctrine, theology and ethics
- *practice* honest and respectful dialogue with course texts, classmates and the professor.
- It is hoped, students will be *stirred* to renewed, yet humble, faithfulness.

Required reading: All students will read assigned sections of the following books, plus required articles

William C. Placher, ed. *Essentials of Christian Theology*. Westminster John Knox, 2003. ISBN 0664223958: the chapters that pertain to the theological loci studied in this course.

Fedler, Kyle D. *Exploring Christian Ethics: Biblical Foundations for Morality*. WJK, 206. ISBN: 10-0-664-22898-4 chapters 1-4.

Donald J. Brash. *The Indispensable Guide to God's Word*. The Pilgrim Press, 2010. ISBN: 9780829818291 (use Follet reprint)

One book for the group presentation, TBD. Readings located on Brightspace webpage for this course, as indicated in the course schedule below. The professor reserves the freedom to add to, or replace, readings in the supplemental schedule - up to 150 additional pages.

Students will choose and become thoroughly familiar with one book from among the following five options

Dolores Williams. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Orbis Books, 1995. ISBN 13 9781570750267

Gustavo Gutierrez. *A Theology of Liberation*. Orbis, 1988. ISBN 0883445425

Rosemary Radford Reuther. *Sexism and God-talk*. Beacon Press, 1993. ISBN 080701205X

James H. Cone. *Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition with Responses*. Orbis Books, 1990. ISBN 13 9780883446850

Students will choose one of the following, representing the student's church tradition, and read the chapters that pertain to the theological loci studied in the fall semester.

Gabriel Fackre. *The Christian Story, Vol. 1*. Eerdmans, 1996. ISBN 13 978082841070 (Baptists/Independents)

Wilson, Kenneth. *Methodist Theology*. T & T Clark, 2011. ISBN 9780567644985. (Methodists, Pentecostals)

Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*. Eerdmans, 2004. ISBN13 9780802827876. (Presbyterian and Reformed)

Graded Course Requirements: Overview

Assignment	Value: Up to	Due
DoSER assignment	30 points	Four conversations, a short essay and a group presentation: weeks 3, 6, 9, 10, and 11 or 12
Two substantive theological position papers	25 each for 50 total points	Weeks 8 and 13
Round Table discussion and class participation	20 points	Weeks 5, and 6

**** Evaluation** will be based on these criteria:

- 1) *Accuracy* and thoroughness of the student's comprehension of course material, including the categories and intersections of theological thinking,
- 2) *Depth* of personal, critical engagement with historic Christian doctrines,
- 3) *Clarity* of expression of the student's own beliefs,
- 4) Demonstrated *ability to think theologically*,
- 5) *Reflection* on the relationship between theology and the practice of ministry,
- 6) *Self-evaluation* and peer evaluation of student's work (Note: the professor will determine the final grade for each student)

Grades are awarded on the following scale:

Percent	Letter	GP	Notes
95-100	A	4.0	Work is excellent
90-94	A-	3.7	Work is very good with some excellent aspects
87-89	B+	3.3	Work is very good
84-86	B	3.0	Work is good
80-83	B-	2.7	Basically good work with some adequate aspects
76-79	C+	2.3	Adequate work with some good aspects

Guidelines and Expectations for Class Participants:

- 1) ***Attend classes.*** This includes arriving to class prepared, on time and staying for the entire session. The student should inform the instructor as soon as possible when unable to attend class. Multiple absences, or repeatedly missing portions of classes, may result in a lower grade or in being asked to withdraw.

2) ***Submit assignments on time.*** If an assignment will be late, please explain your circumstances to the professor. When an extension has not been granted, late papers will lose five points for each day they are late. (This is in order to be fair, not to exact punishment.) Any students unable to turn in required work by the last day of class must make timely and appropriate arrangements for an extension through the Registrar's Office.

3) ***Written work must be double-spaced with one-inch margins, typed using Arial or Times New Roman font at 12 pitch, and otherwise conform to the manual of style adopted for use by the Seminary (Kate Turabian's Chicago Manual for students in higher education). Footnotes are to be used in lieu of endnotes.***

4) ***Students must respect (not necessarily agree with) the statement of faith and the policies of the Seminary. Note: plagiarism is taken very seriously at PTS. See the student handbook for details of this policy.***

5) Students must ***treat each other with respect.*** An atmosphere of collegiality will be cultivated at all times. Collegiality, which cannot exist without mutual respect, requires the freedom to express one's own thoughts and convictions; it also requires willingness to listen to the beliefs of others. This listening cannot be merely perfunctory in a truly collegial environment: collegial listening occurs when the listener makes room for the possibility that the other may be right.

6) ***Students may not use cell phones or browse the internet during class unless such use assists that class session.***

Schedule of Topics and Due Dates: (tentative)			
Date	Basic topic	Reading prep	Assignments due
Session question Session 1 8/31 What are our questions? And how shall we address them?	Introduction to the course: Tone, attitude, and architecture)	Brash, 1 st half Outline of How to Read a Book (Brightspace)	Form DoSER (Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion) groups

<p>Session 2 9/7</p> <p>What are the grounds and sources of our beliefs?</p>	<p>Theologies of Revelation</p>	<p>Brash, 2nd half</p> <p>Phyllis Tribble (Brightspace)</p> <p>Optional: Barth (Brightspace)</p>	
<p>Session 3 9/14</p> <p>Who else grounds our beliefs and how do they influence our conclusions?</p>	<p>Philosophy, Science, Theology and Method</p>	<p>Placher, ch. 1, pp. 11-49</p> <p>Begin reading RT discussion partner</p>	<p>First DoSER conversation (Question creation and bibliography planning)</p>
<p>Session 4 9/21</p> <p>How does what you believe shape what you do, and vice-versa?</p>	<p>Theoretical foundations and structures of Christian ethics</p>	<p>Fedler, ch. 1-4</p>	
<p>Session 5 9/28</p> <p>How may Trinitarian theologies reinforce, or challenge, hierarchies in churches and wider societies?</p>	<p>The Divine Community of being: God's vision from the beginning</p>	<p>Placher, ch. 1, pp. 51-92</p> <p>Tradition specific theologian on the Trinity</p> <p>Optional: Gregory Nazianzus (Brightspace)</p>	<p>First Round Table Discussion on the question of the day</p>
<p>Session 6 10/5</p> <p>Is the Doctrine of the Trinity good news for the poor and the marginalized?</p>	<p>The Doctrine of the Trinity as good news for <u>the poor (and other marginalized people)</u></p>	<p>Leonardo Boff (Brightspace reserve readings)</p> <p>Catherine LaCugna (Brightspace reserve readings)</p>	<p>DoSER conversation 2 (Book reporting and essay planning)</p>

<p>Session 7 10/12</p> <p>Can God do something new?</p>	<p><u>God the Creator</u></p>	<p>Placher, ch. 3, pp. 93-131</p> <p>Tradition specific theologian on God's attributes</p> <p>Optional: Hall and Sanders (Brightspace)</p>	<p>Second Round Table Discussion on the question of the day</p>
<p>Reading week: October 19 Counts toward total weeks of the semester: Week 8</p>			
<p>Session 8 10/26</p> <p>When is our God a projection of our need?</p>	<p><u>Naming and Knowing God</u></p>	<p>Selections from Mesle (Brightspace)</p>	<p>Substantive Position Paper 1 on question selected from syllabus (See below a detailed description of the assignment)</p>
<p>Session 9 11/2</p> <p>What does current cosmology require of a theology of human nature?</p> <p>Do humans exist without our bodies? DoSER</p>	<p><u>Human nature and the processes of the cosmos</u></p> <p><u>Human nature and the processes of biology</u></p>	<p>Placher, ch. 4, pp. 133-181</p> <p>Tradition specific theologian on humanity and sin</p> <p>Selections Thistlethwaite</p> <p>Optional: Selections from Gushie Callahan (Brightspace)</p>	<p>DoSER conversation 3 (Essay discussion and presentation planning)</p>
<p>Session 10 11/9</p> <p>Does anyone sin alone?</p>	<p><u>Sins, mistakes and diseases: discerning error, sin and evil</u></p>	<p>Cooper Schneider (Brightspace)</p>	<p>DoSER conversation 4 (Finalizing presentation)</p>

Session 11 11/16 Presentations – Groups 1 and 2			
Thanksgiving recess 11/26			
Session 12 11/30 Presentations – Groups 3 and 4			
Session 13 12/7 How might I address my questions from session 1?	Course summation	Complete unread required reading assignments	Substantive Position Paper 2 on question selected from syllabus (See below a detailed description of the assignment)
Week 15 - Finals week - Certification of percentage of reading accomplished. 12/14			

Detailed Description of Requirements

1) *Participate in class exercises and discussions.* For classroom experiences to be as meaningful as can be, each participant must be both a learner and teacher; for this reason, among others, all students must come to class fully prepared. Preparation includes completing required readings as indicated in the course schedule.

2) *Write two theological position papers.* Choose three questions from the following list; write one paper on each of those questions. The chief purpose of these papers is to cultivate the ability to think theologically in well informed ways. While students should develop their responses to the questions in dialogue with class readings and presentations, students should be careful to express *their own* thinking. As position papers, to be distinguished from opinion papers, it is expected that coherent, logical thinking that draws appropriately on **theological** sources from the course readings will be evident. Topics for the first paper should pertain to subjects covered during class sessions to date; the same is true of the second and the third papers.

The optional questions are in the left margins of the course schedule. Note that the second position paper will address the question assigned to the group.

Keep in mind that these are theology papers. Use of scriptures requires methods of biblical interpretation taught in biblical studies courses at Palmer Theological Seminary. Students also should be mindful of learnings from Church History class about the development of Christian thought.

The essay portion of these papers will be between 2100 and 2700 words. Posted online is a rubrics grid for this assignment. **Check-mark the boxes on the grid that you believe reflect the qualities of what you have written and attach one to each of the papers when you submit them.** They are worth up to 25 points each for a total of 50 points toward the student's final course grade.

3) *Participate in round-table discussions*

Each student will be assigned a dialogue partner, that is a contextual theologian, from the list on page two (2) of this syllabus. Each student *is required* to present in assigned small groups information regarding the contents and theological implications of his/her dialogue partner regarding the principal question of the class session (See blue text in course schedule). There will be two such group sessions.

In the first, all members of the group will have read the same book. In the second, each participant will have read a different book. The student's contribution will be expressed in the voice of the RT discussion partner. When other students ask questions of the book the student has read, s/he should respond in the voice of the author. Get "into the author's shoes," so to speak.

Round Table discussion participation is combined with overall class participation and is worth up to 20 points.

4) **DOSER (Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion) ASSIGNMENT:**

GROUP PROJECT AND PRESENTATION: With a diverse group (4-5 students) formed by the professor according to students' subject interests, students' will explore the theological implications of current science for Christian theologies of creation and human nature. These implications will concern possible adjustments to those and related theological loci and infer the consequences of those changes for current issues in Christian ethics.

The group will report on its results through a detailed presentation to the class. The professor will select, with the students' consent, one or more presentations for sharing at an additional venue for a seminary or university audience.

The foundation of the presentation will be 1) a single outline written by the entire group, 2) a succinct essay on the subject from each student in the group, which will be the written components of the presentation (i.e., each person's script). These and any slides, films, artwork that support the presentation should be submitted to the professor before the class presentation. The outline will be distributed to the entire class. (The TA will be available for photocopying.)

An example of a topic-focus is the size and complexity and evolution of the universe compared with the traditional theological assertions and assumptions about the place of humanity in the created order. If this topic were the students' choice, then the outline they would write together would have, *1) an explanation of the central position of humanity in the traditional doctrine(s) of creation, 2) critical assessments of the currency of alternative theological anthropologies that attempt to account for the new cosmology, and 3) an anticipation of possible implications of the group's proposed theological anthropology for Christian ethics.*

Another option for this project is the unitary identity of human beings according to neuropsychology and biology compared with the body-soul dualism of so much popular Christian thinking in general about human nature and some theological anthropologies in particular. If this topic were the students' choice, then the outline they would write together would have, *1) a critical survey of the evidence for a substantially unitary human nature from current science, 2) examples of body-soul dualism in Christian theological anthropology and its popular expressions, as well as those of biblical-*

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theological criticisms of anthropological dualism, 3) critical assessments of the currency of alternative theological anthropologies that attempt to account for the new scientific anthropology, and 4) an anticipation of possible implications of the group's proposed theological anthropology for Christian ethics.

The professor and guest speakers will provide initial resources and research guidance for the launching of group projects. The professor and/or TA should review all first drafts of group outlines and essays after session 9 and before they are put all in their final form for the professor's evaluation. Project outlines will be shared with the class through a creative class presentation. This assignment is worth up to 30 points toward the student's final course grade.

Curriculum assignment correlation

- 1) Participate in class exercises and discussions. [1.2, 1.4, 2 all, 3 all, 4.2]
- 2) Write two theological position papers [1.4, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.3, 4.2]
- 3) Participate in round-table discussions [1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.3, 4.2]
- 4) DoSER grant project [1.2, 1.4, 2.2, 3.3, 3.1, 4.2]

M. DIV. PROGRAM GOALS & INDICATORS TABLE

INDICATORS	Goal 1 A hunger for lifelong spiritual formation & a commitment to fostering interdependent relationships [WHOLE PERSONS]	Goal 2 The ability to engage in the reality and the theology of diverse communities; [global context of the Christian tradition; intercultural understanding] [WHOLE WORLD]	Goal 3 A biblically informed and theologically grounded commitment to a Holistic Gospel Witness. [WHOLE GOSPEL]	Goal 4 A commitment to service in the church and community to minister to changing times [WHOLE GOSPEL]
Indicator 1	1.1 Articulates an awareness of self in relationship to God by identifying and using a variety of spiritual disciplines and practices	2.1 Defines and describes the heritage and traditions of the communities out of which the student comes, in which the student serves, and to which the student relates	3.1 Applies skill in the use of biblical, theological and ethical tools for ministry, such as language study, research methods, hermeneutics, critical reflection and clear communication	4.1 Articulates a call to a particular area of Christian service
Indicator 2	1.2 Develops respect for and ability to partner effectively with others	2.2 Uses the tools of critical reflection, research methods, interpretation of sources and clear communication in intercultural understanding	3.2 Clearly communicates biblical content and understanding in a variety of ways, e.g. preaching, Christian Education, pastoral care	4.2 Articulates and demonstrates biblical and theological foundations for the practice of ministry
Indicator 3	1.3 Employs reliance upon connection with God for the purpose of Christian service	2.3 Integrates the content of Christian heritage and mission into a personal theology and practice of ministry	3.3 Articulates ability to address personal, social, and global questions and issues biblically, theologically and ethically in ways that lead toward healing and wholeness	4.3 Documents awareness of the impact of oneself in the practice of ministry through personal reflection

Indicator 4	1.4 Develops a personal confession of faith that demonstrates biblical and theological understanding at a level consistent with seminary education		3.4 Reports/Observes ability to minister with a Christian spirit conducive to creating peace and reconciliation	4.4 Applies skills in ministry, e.g. preaching, pastoral care, teaching, administrating, engaging in mission and evangelism
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NOTE:

*****PowerPoint slides made available to students are the property of Dr. Brash and may be downloaded or printed only for the use of students in this course.

Recommended bibliography with discussion board: located online at the Brightspace website.

Rubrics and self-evaluation guides: located online at the Brightspace website.
ion guides: located online at the Brightspace website.