

Syllabus for COS 522: Theology in the Contemporary Church
February 2-3; March 2-3, 2018
Martin Methodist College, Pulaski, Tennessee
Instructor: Robert A. Ratcliff
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Course Goals:

- To prepare students for the life-long task of seeing all of life through the lens of their faith.
- To equip students to serve as theological teachers and guides within their congregations.
- To introduce students to the most important contemporary theological movements and schools of thought.

Required Reading:

[Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, Third Edition \(Eerdmans, 2014\)](#)

[Howard Stone and James Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, Third Edition \(Fortress, 2013\)](#)

Information on the assignments and final exam:

Failure to turn in any of the assignments or the final exam will result, not only in a “0” for that assignment or exam, but a “0” for the entire course.

Pre-Course Assignment (The written assignment is due by Tuesday, Jan 30. Please submit as a Microsoft Word document, and send it to the e-mail address listed above):

1. Read Stone and Duke, all chapters; read Migliore, beginning through chapter 4
2. Using Stone and Duke’s “Great Hymnal Controversy” as a guide, describe an event or decision in the life of your church in which significant disagreement about what the church should do took place. Briefly present all sides of the controversy in such a way that the reader will not know what your own position on the matter was. Then at more length identify the specifically *theological* issues or concerns that underlay both or all sides of the argument. **Please note:** It is natural to frame one’s own position in theological terms, while describing the position with which you disagreed in other terms (for example, “he just thinks everything should be done his way.”) Yet those with whom you disagreed would tell you that they were trying to serve the interests of the church and the Kingdom, just as you were. *What are the specifically theological issues at stake in their position?* Failure to recognize the specifically theological issues on *both* sides will result in a lower grade. If you are uncertain how to proceed, e-mail or call me. Write up your description and reflection in a paper of no less than 1200 and no more than 1500 words (approx. 4-5 double-spaced pages). Come to class prepared to discuss this incident in the life of your church, and the theological issues it raises.

Mid-Course Assignment (the written assignment is due by Tuesday, February 27. Please submit as a Microsoft Word document, and send it to the e-mail address listed above):

1. Read Migliore, chapter 5 through the end.
2. Choose one (1) doctrine from the following list:

Sin/the human condition

Christology

The Trinity

Soteriology

Pneumatology/The Holy Spirit

Ecclesiology

Eschatology/last things

For this doctrine, briefly describe what Stone and Duke call the *embedded* theology of the members of your congregation. Then outline something you would do—preach a series of sermons, teach a class, or the like—that would move the members of your church toward what Stone and Duke call a more *deliberative* theology on this doctrine. Do so in a paper of no less than 1200 and no more than 1500 words.

Honor Code:

The honor code of the Memphis/Tennessee/Holston Course of Study [can be found by clicking here.](#)

Please be certain to print, fill out, sign, and attach the cover sheet to each assignment. When turning in an assignment via e-mail attachment, you can fulfill this requirement by including the following statement in the body of the e-mail: “I have read the plagiarism definition on the Memphis/Tennessee/Holston Course of Study Honor Code, and I affirm that the attached assignment represents my own work, except where credit is given. I have also made copies of this assignment, and I will bring them with me to class in the event that any of my work is misplaced.”

Plagiarism is theft of another person’s work and lying by claiming to have written something that you didn’t write. If I suspect that a student has plagiarized, I will use the following procedure:

- I will offer the student an opportunity to rewrite the paper.
- The student may then either rewrite the paper, or request that I re-examine the paper.

- If I re-examine the paper and discover no evidence of plagiarism (in other words, can find no other document from which sections of the paper have been copied or adapted), I will then assign a grade to the paper as normal.
- If I re-examine the paper and find proof that plagiarism has taken place (in other words, can find other documents from which sections of the paper have been copied or adapted), then I will assign the paper a failing grade. **At this point, the student will have no opportunity to rewrite the paper, nor to appeal my decision.**
- For a good explanation of plagiarism and ways to avoid it, see the following web pages:
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/02/>
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/1/>

Final Examination

The final will be take home, and will be due to me no later than 9:00 p.m. CST on Friday, March 9. I will distribute the final at the end of class on March 3.

Grading:

Pre-course assignment:	30%
Mid-course assignment:	30%
Final Exam:	20%
Class participation:	20%

Tardiness in attendance and/or assignments, without prior approval by the instructor, will result in a reduced grade.

Additional Resources:

[Donald K. McKim, editor, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* Second Edition \(Westminster John Knox Press, 2014\)](#)

Class Schedule

Friday, February 2 2018	
6:00-7:40 p.m.	Introduction to theological study Thinking theologically in ministry Discussion of pre-course assignment
7:40-7:50 p.m.	Break
7:50-9:30 p.m.	Discussion of pre-course assignment (cont.)
Saturday, February 3 2018	
8:00-9:55 a.m.	God as Trinity
9:55-10:05 a.m.	Break
10:05 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Providence and the Will of God Creation
12:00-12:45 p.m.	Lunch
12:45-2:25 p.m.	The human predicament Incarnation
2:25-2:35 p.m.	Break
2:35-4:00 p.m.	Atonement Grace
Friday, March 2 2018	
6:00-7:40 p.m.	The Holy Spirit The Christian Life
7:40-7:50 p.m.	Break
7:50-9:30 p.m.	The Church Proclamation and Sacraments

Saturday, March 3 2018	
8:00-9:55 a.m.	Christian faith and other religions Christian hope and last things
9:55-10:05 a.m.	Break
10:05 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Protestant Liberalism Neo-orthodoxy
12:00-12:45 p.m.	Lunch
12:45-2:30 p.m.	Evangelical theology Postliberal theology Liberation Black Theology
2:30-3:00 p.m.	Communion service
3:00-4:00 p.m.	Feminism Womanism U.S. Latino/a theology

Course Web Site:

This syllabus, as well as lecture outlines for each of the class sessions, are available at my web site: <http://tinyurl.com/jojchtj>