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# SP 501 Communication as Christian Rhetoric

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**Asbury Theological Seminary**  
**SP 501 – Communication as Christian Rhetoric**  
FALL 2008

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**Credit:** 2 hours  
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**First Posted Version**

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**Welcome ...**

to SP501 – Communication as Christian Rhetoric

The purpose of SP510 is to introduce and provide a context for the art of written and spoken communication within a clearly articulated theological framework in the service of Christian ministry. The course has been designed to address particular needs in the theological curriculum by providing a foundation for preaching, teaching and a variety of other forms of ministry. Our learning will proceed by means of reflection and performance; we will examine both Christian and classical rhetoric to acquire practical wisdom for clear, coherent and persuasive written and oral communication in the service of the gospel and kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The goal of SP 501 is for you to grow and mature in character, confidence, conviction and courage as a Christian communicator. Also, I hope you will begin to make important connections between the Word of God and human words, God's speech and human speech, recognizing that not only what we say, but who we are, and also how, why and to whom we speak, are all critical issues that must be seriously examined from within a sound theological perspective. I encourage you to see this course in light of your vocation: preaching, teaching, counseling, administration, specialized ministries, etc. Use what we do to prepare yourself for the next step you will take on the path to that ministry.

**Course Description**

*"Communication as Christian Rhetoric provides a context for instruction and practice that introduces the art of written and spoken communication within a clearly articulated Wesleyan theological framework for the purpose of Christian ministry. As a core course within the theological curriculum, its purpose does not simply replicate undergraduate speech and communication studies. Students will be provided with appropriate means for cultivating necessary habits of Christian life and speech in light of the Christian rhetorical tradition, classical rhetoric, and contemporary communication studies in preparation for Christian ministry in a multicultural society. This course is designed to integrate theological and scriptural knowledge, rhetorical and cultural understanding, for clear, coherent, and persuasive written and oral expressions of Christian speech in the practice of Christian leadership."* (ATS 2005-07 *Catalog*, p. 182)

## **Course Objectives/Expected Student Competencies:**

Having successfully completed this course, students will demonstrate ability to:

1. Express a basic understanding of how practical wisdom—derived from biblical and classical rhetoric, communication and cultural studies—informs the practice of Christian speech;
2. Demonstrate sufficient theological and practical understanding for faithful use of Christian language, for selecting and arranging material in a manner fitting for particular situations and audiences, and for clear, coherent presentations and persuasive delivery;
3. Articulate persuasive arguments in written and oral form that demonstrate a capacity for faithful Christian discourse supported by appropriate research and reflection;
4. Within a Wesleyan framework, communicate a vision of Christian rhetoric that demonstrates an understanding of how theory is embedded in and informs practice.

## **Course Material:**

### **Required Reading:**

1. St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. (1999). *On Christian Teaching (De Doctrina Christiana)*. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Schultze, Quentin. (2000). *Communicating for Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic.

OR

Walker, Andrew. (1996). *Telling the Story: Gospel, Mission and Culture*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers (reproduced by permission of SPCK).

### **“As Needed” Reading (a good resource if you speak infrequently):**

Litfin, Duane. (1992.) *Public Speaking: A Handbook for Christians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

### **Recommended Reading:**

Gangel, Kenneth O. and Canine, Samuel L. (2002). *Communication and Conflict Management in Churches and Christian Organizations*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers.

Heath, Chip and Heath, Dan (2007). *Made to Stick: Why Some ideas Survive and Others Die*. New York, NY: Random House.

Kraft, Charles. H. (2005). *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (rev. ed.); Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Miller, Calvin. (1994.) *The Empowered Communicator: Seven Keys to Unlocking an Audience*. Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Stone, Dave (2004). *Refining Your Style: Learning from Respected Communicators*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing.

Please note: Readings may be supplemented from time to time.

## **Course Requirements:**

Additional detail (if needed) will be provided at the opening class session.

1. Two- to three-page reflection on Schultze's *Communicating for Life* OR Walker's *Telling the Story*. Structure this paper in three parts: (1) Highlight what you consider to be the author's main points or most important ideas; (2) Respond to what you've read [Do you agree? Disagree? Did you learn anything new? etc.]; (3) Describe briefly how you will use what you've learned from this reading to enhance your ministry.
2. Two-page reflection on the Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Ephesians. Consider: In terms of communication, what is the Apostle alerting us to watch for? What can we learn about cultural forms of language, communication and the various media we may use? As Christian leaders, how does the redemptive work of God in Christ inform our use of these resources and us as their users? How should we see ourselves as Christian communicators who have been redeemed by the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ?
3. Two- to three-page reflection on Augustine's *Teaching Christianity*. Describe the kind of people Augustine believes we must become, especially with regard to the important issues of faith, character, wisdom and constancy of purpose, if we are to be faithful Christian communicators. What kind of knowledge does he prescribe? How can this be acquired? Why do you think this work was the standard text on the subject for over 1,000 years? Of what value is this book for the practice of ministry?
4. Four oral presentations; length to be determined based on class size (10 minutes or less). Each presentation will be made on a Christian topic, theme, person or subject, and may not be about you. Your aim will be to instruct, engage, persuade, bring understanding, stir emotions and/or incite behavior. The presentations must be supported by authority(ies) other than your personal experience, opinion and feelings. At least one of these presentations must be persuasive. One will be followed by a collaborative experience.  
When you present in class, please turn in an outline or manuscript (whichever you use) that includes a well formulated topic/goal statement.
5. Final Essay.  
In 4-5 pages, communicate your vision of Christian rhetoric, demonstrating your understanding of communication theory and practice.

All papers: double-spaced, 12-pt. type, 1-inch margins

## **Course Assessment**

1. Schultze or Walker reflection paper – 10 pts.
2. Pauline reflection paper – 10 pts.
3. Augustine reflection paper – 10 pts.
4. Oral Presentations – 10 pts. each (40 pts total)
5. Final Essay – 20 pts.
6. Attendance and Participation – 10 pts.

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Total possible points = 100

## **Course Grading Criteria:**

### **Graded Work:**

Asbury Seminary defines grades using the following criteria (ATS 2004-05 *Catalog*, p. 29):

- A= Exceptional work: surpassing, markedly outstanding achievement of course objectives
- B= Good work: strong, significant achievement of course objectives
- C= Acceptable work: basic, essential achievement of course objectives
- D= Marginal work: inadequate, minimal achievement of course objectives
- F= Unacceptable work: failure to achieve course objectives

A plus (+) or minus (-) indicates positions between categories (for example, B+ = very good; C- = slightly below acceptable, etc.).

### **Incomplete Work:**

"A grade of 'I' denotes that the work of a course has not been completed due to an unavoidable emergency, which does not include delinquency or attending to church work or other employment. If the work of the course is incomplete at the end of a term without an emergency, a letter grade will be given based on the grades of work done, with incomplete work counted as 'F.' " (*Catalog*)

### **Assignment Notes:**

1. Presentations must be given on the assigned dates.  
Basically, make-up speeches are simply not possible except in certain extreme cases.
2. Late completion of work will result in a reduction of points earned.

### **How to Submit Course Work:**

It is my preference that you turn in course work **in class** on the date specified. (I read best on paper, and prefer not to have to print out all of your work myself.) You may also submit coursework by email. *When submitting work electronically, each assignments should be prepared with a document title beginning with your last name, then your first name, and then a short item description such as "Schultze Paper,"* ending with ".doc" or ".rtf" or whatever appropriate designator.

### **Course Schedule:**

First day of class TBD; class will meet over 5 Saturdays, from approximately 9 am to 3 pm.