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Kingdom, Church, and World

IS 501X

Spring, 2002

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Introduction and Course Description: Welcome to the summer session of Kingdom, Church, and World. I am assistant professor of philosophical theology at Asbury Theological Seminary, and this course is one about which I am very passionate! There are few courses that give one an opportunity to critically examine one's presuppositions and commitments regarding the nature of the Kingdom of God and its relatedness to the concepts of Church and World. These are three distinct, but intimately related aspects of the reality in which we all engage in ministry--whether we be laypersons or clergy, yet, how can one successfully engage that ministry without thoroughly examining these aspects of that reality? In this course, we will have opportunity to consider a number of questions and issues including:

1. What is the Kingdom of God?
2. What is the Church?
3. How is the Kingdom present in the World through the Church?
4. What does it mean to be a part of the Church that is in the World?
5. What does it mean to **be** the Church?
6. What does it mean to **engage in** Churchly activities?

By the end of the summer, we will have examined these matters and we shall have given first-order attempt at theologically sound and praxis-oriented answers to these questions. Let the fun begin!

Course Rationale: It is altogether reasonable to ask, with regard to a given course, why a particular course is required, and so it is here. There is a sense in which this entire syllabus is intended to answer that question, but I would characterize this course as having at least two over-arching intentions. First, an essential skill for all engaged in Christian ministry is the ability to "think theologically." To think theologically is not merely to be able to appropriate certain proof texts in order to give "biblical" answers to given questions. Rather, it involves the ability to begin to "get our arms around" the biblical message as a

whole, to be able to inquire of the biblical narratives in an integrative way, and to be able to develop our answers in a more holistic fashion. Already, I have referenced our ability to properly appropriate the biblical texts, and this brings us to the second over-arching intention: to begin to see the Scriptures as organized around certain integrative motifs. In this regard, this course brings together the disciplines of biblical study and systematic theology in a way that demonstrates the practical integration of the two. Issues of importance include:

1. What constitutes a biblical “meta-narrative”? Is there only one or are there multiple ones?
2. What role do these meta-narratives play?
3. How is one to understand the relation of “part” and “whole” when interpreting the biblical narratives?
4. What does it mean to refer to the biblical materials as “narrative”?
5. How does the biblical narrative subvert normal ways of “being” in the world?

By engaging these questions, we will be undertaking a critical examination of some of our fundamental assumptions about who we are and what God calls us to be as his Church. This may be dis-orienting from time to time, but keep in mind our end goal: to understand more fully what we understand ourselves to be as people of God and to understand what it means to be in His service in the World as representatives of his Kingdom.

Course Objectives: Having successfully completed this course, students will be able to:

1. Articulate an understanding of the biblical meta-narrative that comes to focus for us best in Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God;
2. Identify the particular contribution of the Wesleyan tradition to our understanding of this meta-narrative;
3. Draw out major theological, moral, and philosophical implications of this meta-narrative, especially as these are related to the nature and mission of the people of God;
4. Evaluate cultural products (e.g., literature, television, movies, advertisements, print media, music) in light of major theological, moral, and philosophical implications of this meta-narratives;

5. Exercise criticism with respect to one's own cultural context and discernment with respect to the context of others vis-a-vis major theological, moral, and philosophical implications of this meta-narrative;
6. Articulate the ecclesial and missional implications of this meta-narrative--specifically for one's own context and generally for our shared global context; and
7. Exhibit a heightened sense of commitment to serving the kingdom of God in mission in the world (the *missio dei*).

Required Texts:

Clapp, Rodney. *Border Crossings*. Brazos Press, 2000.
 Hauerwas, Stanley and Will Willimon. *Resident Aliens*, ??????
 Willimon, Wil. *Shaped by the Bible*, ??
 Donovan, Vincent. *Christianity Rediscovered*, ???
 Wright, Tom. *The Challenge of Jesus*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999.
 Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus*. Wm.B.Eerdmans, 1972 (or the second edition, 1994).

Please note: these readings may be supplemented from time-to-time with materials made available via electronic media. Advance notice will be given.

Collateral Reading: (purely optional, but related material)

Brimlow and Budde, *Christianity Incorporated*
 Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Peaceable Kingdom*
 McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*
 Ramachandra, Vinoth. *Gods that Fail*
 Snyder, Howard. *God's Kingdom Now*

Course Assessment: Determination of grade for this course will utilize a variety of assessments.

First, students will be evaluated with regard to their active and substantive participation in on-line discussions--primarily within your small groups, but also within the course-wide discussion center. I will be looking for thoughtful, succinct questions and commentary upon the questions of others. *Please note that this includes providing comment upon each small group's "kingdom project."* **This will constitute 10% of the course grade.**

Second, students will be evaluated with regard to their active and substantive participation in small Groups. Each group will use specific materials, and specific assignments will be included in the weekly module assignments. The purpose of these groups is to provide an opportunity for students to “meet together” and to share insights from the weekly disciplines, to hold each other accountable, and to encourage each other to live faithfully as children of God’s kingdom. Each student will be assigned to a small group with at least three other students. During the course of the week, each member of each small group is to read through the material and engage in dialogue with all other members of his/her small group. Prayer and other forms of mutual support is strongly recommended. **This will constitute 10% of the course grade.**

Third, students are expected to participate in a “kingdom project.” These projects are aimed at involving each student with active participation in some form of outreach ministries. I will provide a list of examples of the type of projects that would be acceptable, and each student will indicate his/her selection by the end of the third week of class. Each kingdom project will include the student’s posting a brief presentation upon the nature and theological significance of his/her project, including a two page reflection paper. The goal of this brief paper is to integrate practice and theological reflection with regard to the kingdom project. **The presentation and reflection will constitute 20% of the course grade.**

Fourth and fifth, respectively, there will be both a *mid-term* and a *final* exam. **Each will count 30%; thus, both exams together will constitute 60% of the course grade.**

These are examples of Mid-term questions (please note they are not the actual questions):

1. Select one from the following, possible integrative motifs for the Scriptures, and then:
 - a. demonstrate its validity from a biblical standpoint,
 - b. explicate its theological significance.

Possible integrative motifs:

- +God is creating a world of creatures for fellowship with himself.
- +God is reconciling a world of fallen creatures to himself and to each other.
- +Our God is an awesome God who reigns from heaven on high.

2. Stan Hauerwas has said that the main task of the church is to *be* the church in the world. Develop a theological vision of what it means to *be* the

church without too quickly falling back merely into the question of what the church should be *doing*.

Each question is to be not less than 2 and not more than 3 pages, double spaced.

Examples of Final Exam question (please note they are not the actual questions for the final exam):

1. In The Politics of Jesus, John Howard Yoder argues that, in the realm of personal and social ethics, we do not really take the example of Jesus seriously. In fact, he gives six commonly accepted reasons for sitting aside the example of Jesus for some other moral exemplar. Your assignment is as follows:

- a. Review in detail the six reasons Yoder gives on pages 4-8,
- b. Provide two pages of your best argument (don't forget to incorporate the biblical witness, but do not fall into the proof-texting trap) as to why Yoder is wrong in his thesis that Jesus and his life should always be the moral example for our personal and social ethics,
- c. Provide two pages of your best argument (same cautionary note) as to why Yoder is right in the thesis stated in b,
- d. Provide four pages wherein you synthesize what you've discovered and work out its implications for life in the kingdom in the world.

Again, please double space your paper.

Course Schedule: (Please note that the presentations on the assigned videos *are not* merely lectures that deal with the assigned readings. Rather, they come at the same set of issues from differing perspectives. In the description of the module, I will comment briefly upon both any assigned videos and the assigned readings.)

Module 1, week 1:

View Video Tape One--Gutenson on Meta Narrative and Trevor Hart Discussion.

Reading: The Challenge of Jesus, Chapters 1, 2, and 3, and Shaped by the Bible.

One of the primary foci of this class is to begin to develop an appreciation of the significance of a more holistic approach to appropriation of the biblical narratives. As an introduction to this topic, the video deals with the nature of narrative and begins to suggest the significance of a narrational approach to the Scriptures. As Christians, our appropriation of the biblical narratives begins with

God's unsurpassable revelation in Jesus Christ. N.T. Wright helps us see the shape of the biblical narrative as viewed through the lens of the revelation in Christ.

Module 2, week 2:

View Video Tape Two--Fisher on Genesis 1-11

Reading: The Challenge of Jesus, chapters 4 and 5.

There are a number of differing "integrative motifs" that one might use to characterize the overall biblical narrative. Prof. Fisher has often used the acronym: CASKET to capture that narrative for the Old Testament story. The letters of the acronym stand for **C**reation, **A**braham, **S**inai, **K**ings, **E**xile, and **T**emple. This video begins the process by looking at the beginning of the narrative. The readings in N.T. Wright continue our examination of the mutually implicative contributions that the biblical narrative and the revelation of Christ make to each other.

Module 3, week 3:

Continue consideration of Video Two--Fisher on Genesis 1-11.

Reading: The Challenge of Jesus, chapters 6, 7, and 8.

Continuation and expansion of the themes from last week.

Module 4, week 4:

View Video Three--Fisher on Creation, Uncreation, Recreation.

Reading: Border Crossings, parts 1 and 2.

The video for this module focuses specifically upon the "brink of uncreation" that comes at God's judgment upon humanity at the time of the Flood. Dr. Fisher points how the theme of creation (taken broadly to include "creation", "uncreation", and "recreation") is central to the biblical narrative. Dr. Clapp begins to examine the extent to which we, as Christians, bifurcate the world in which we live--observing one set of "rules" when we are in the "spiritual realm" and another when we are "in the world." Dr. Clapp rightly highlights the extent to which this is a conceptual failure to understand the all-embracing nature of God's call to the world.

Module 5, week 5:

Continue consideration of Video Three--Fisher on Creation-Uncreation-Recreation.

Reading: Border Crossings, parts 3 and 4.

Continuation and expansion of the themes from last week.

Module 6, week 6:

View Video Tape Five--Gutenson on Pannenberg.

Reading: Resident Aliens, chapters 1, 2, and 3.

In the video, Gutenson examines the contributions of Pannenberg's theology to an appropriation of Scripture along the lines being studied in this course. In the reading, Drs. Willimon and Hauerwas examine the "resident alien" status of Christians in the world, and they consider the implications of the recognition of such a status upon the nature of ministry, mission, and the being of the church. They challenge much of what many of us take utterly for granted about our being in the world--listen carefully and pray hard!

Module 7, week 7:

Continue consideration of video Five--Gutenson on Pannenberg.

Reading: Resident Aliens, chapters 4 and 5.

Continuation and expansion of themes from last week.

Module 8, week 8:

Reading: Resident Aliens, chapters 6 and 7.

Continuation and expansion of the themes from last week.

Module 9, week 9:

View Video Tape Four--Fisher on the Seven Lenses of Jesus.

Reading: Christianity Rediscovered, first half.

The video for this module has Prof. Fisher examining the seven lenses through which we may view Jesus and the manner in which these illumine the biblical narrative.

Module 10, week 10:

Continue consideration of Video Four--Fisher on the Seven Lenses of Jesus.

Reading: Christianity Rediscovered, second half.

Continuation and expansion of the themes from last week.

Module 11, week 11:

View Video Tape Six--Kinlaw.

Reading: The Politics of Jesus, chapters 1, 2, and 3.

In the video, Dr. Dennis Kinlaw provides a guest lecture aimed at showing the marvelous richness of the biblical narrative--a richness that is often lost because of our tendency to: 1) focus upon verses and pericopes, and 2) fail to immerse ourselves in studies aimed at deepening our knowledge of the Scriptures

as a whole. Note how often Dr. Kinlaw makes comments like, “I was in my 40's before I began to see this connection in Scripture” or “In my early 70's, it finally occurred to me that what the Scriptures were saying was” The reading focuses upon the theology of John Howard Yoder, who is one of the most significant theologians from the Mennonite tradition. He challenges us to consider our understanding of the implications of the revelation of God in Christ.

Module 12, week 12:

Continue consideration of video Six--Kinlaw.

Reading: The Politics of Jesus, chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

Continuation and expansion of the themes from last week.

Module 13, week 13:

Reading: The Politics of Jesus, chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12.

Continuation and expansion of the themes from last week.