SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY
SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

STMA 504. GOD, CREATION, AND TRINITY

Winter Quarter 2009
Monday, 1:30 – 4:20 p.m.
Hunthausen 110

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Office Hours by Appointment

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Syllabus

I. Course Description

Examines Christian understandings of God and God's relationship to the world, including the doctrine of the Trinity. Specific topics of discussion may include: the nature of God, God as mystery, God's love and God's power, divine transcendence and immanence; God as creator, liberator, and sustainer of all, models of God's relationship to the world, God and evil; sources, opportunities, and limits of Trinitarian language. Culturally and theologically diverse materials will be considered.

II. S.T.M. Competencies Addressed in this Course

This course primarily addresses the "theological" competencies put forward for the M.Div. degree, especially those listed in section IB:

An ability to reflect theologically on the basic themes of the Christian tradition.

1. A knowledge of the central doctrines of the Christian tradition and various theological expression of those doctrines, including multicultural and ecumenical.
2. An understanding of the interaction of religion and culture diachronically and synchronically within dogmatic and systematic reflection in the Christian tradition.
3. Ability to interpret the tradition for the present (hermeneutics).
4. Ability to reflect on one's own theological method, to contrast it with other methods, and the ability to enable a community to reflect theologically.
5. Ability to integrate theology with pastoral practice.

Secondarily, competencies in Scripture (IA 1, 2, and 4) are also addressed.

III. Course Objectives

The objectives of this course are for each student:

1) to listen deeply and attentively to the wisdom of the Western religious and philosophical traditions concerning God (the gods/the divine), thereby gaining a solid and use-full understanding of the following concepts/themes – the nature, existence, and goodness of God; God and history; human belief in God; God as personal;

2) to engage actively and openly the approach of a representative contemporary theologian (Sallie McFague) and her revisionary way of imaging and thinking God, thereby arriving at a solid and use-full understanding of problematic aspects of traditional Western views of God, as well as alternatives to these views;

3) to wrestle critically and empathetically with the co-presence within Christianity of experience/talk/thought of God as both <u>one</u> and <u>three</u>, thereby developing a solid and use-full understanding of the sources, functions, and limits of both monotheistic and Trinitarian concepts and images;

4) to recognize and embrace the historically and culturally conditioned character of <u>all</u> human perceptions, images, and concepts of God;

5) to develop greater facility in oral and written communication, in theological reflection, and in the integration of theology, spirituality, and ministerial practice;

6) to develop a heightened sensitivity to the difference gender makes (and does not make) in human experience and to the ways race, class, and culture deepen and complicate accounts of human experience;

7) to develop an appreciation for the rich vitality of human experiences of God, as well as for the ways in which God remains always beyond the powers of human imagination and conception.

IV. Texts

Books:

McFague, Sallie. *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1982.

Ward, Keith. *God: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002.

Film:

Bergman, Ingmar (writer and director). "Winter Light [Nattvardsgästerna]." Svensk Filmindustri, 1961.

Articles and Chapters from Books (in the order in which they are assigned):

1. Taylor, Mark Lloyd. "Ishmael's (m)Other: Gender, Jesus, and God in Melville's Moby-Dick." *The Journal of Religion* 72 (1992): 325-350.
2. Taylor, Mark Lloyd. "The Boundless Love of God and the Bounds of Critical Reflection: Schubert Ogden's Contribution to a Theology of Liberation." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 57 (1989): 103-147.
3. Mafico, Temba L.J. "The Divine Name *Yahweh Elohim* from an African Perspective," in *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, ed. by Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, pp. 21-32.
4. Soares-Prabhu, George. "Laughing at Idols: The Dark Side of Biblical Monotheism," in *Reading from this Place*, pp. 109-131.
5. Richard, Pablo. "Theology in the Theology of Liberation," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. by Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993, pp. 150-168.
6. Daly, Mary. "After the Death of God the Father," in *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973, pp. 13-43.
7. LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. "God In Communion with Us: The Trinity," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*. San Francisco: Harper, 1993, pp. 83-114.
8. Boff, Leonardo. "Trinity," in *Mysterium Liberationis*, pp. 389-404.
9. Taylor, Mark Lloyd. "The Love of God, Theology, and Human Liberation," in *God Is Love: A Study in the Theology of Karl Rahner*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986, pp. 389-408.
10. McFague, Sallie. "A Brief Credo," in *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, pp. 3-24.

A course reader, for sale at SUper Copy, includes items 1-6, 8, and 9 on this list of articles and book chapters. Items 7 and 10 come from "recommended" textbooks ordered for the course through the Seattle University Bookstore.

V. Procedures and Assignments

A. Attendance. Class sessions are the primary means by which the instructor and students can share the material introduced in the assigned texts and other activities. Therefore, attendance at all sessions of the course is essential.

B. Reading, Preparation for Class Sessions, and In-Class Participation. Each student is responsible for having read the material assigned for each session of the course and should be prepared to discuss their reading in class. Each student is also responsible for being an active participant in class sessions. Activities will include lectures, large group discussions, and small group work.

C. Gathering/Closing Prayer Leadership. Each student will take leadership for a brief gathering or closing prayer for one of the sessions of the course. Additional guidelines will be provided.

D. Small Group Discussion Leadership. Each student will lead a small group (3 or 4 students) in a discussion of issues emerging from the reading assignment for one of the sessions of the course. Additional guidelines will be provided.

E. Papers. Each student will write three papers on assigned topics. Paper #1 will involve an application of materials from Sallie McFague's book *Models of God* and is due at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, February 2. Paper #2 will involve an application of materials from Keith Ward's book *God: A Guide for the Perplexed* and is due at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, February 23. Paper #3 will serve to integrate course materials with the student's own experience and theological reflection; due at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 16. Additional guidelines will be provided.

VI. Computation of Final Grade

Paper #1	25%
Paper #2	25%
Paper #3	35%
Class Preparation and Participation, Prayer Leadership, and Small Group Leadership	15%

VII. Schedule of Class Sessions and Assignments

A. Getting Acquainted and Getting Oriented

January 5
Introductions and Course Organization
What is Theology?
"Theology of Origin" Exercise

B. Imaging and Thinking God Today

January 12 – Theology, Metaphor, and Models of God
Read and be prepared to discuss:
Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, pp. ix-xv, 1-87

January 19 – No Class Session, Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

January 26 – New Models of God: Mother, Lover, Friend
Read and be prepared to discuss:
McFague, *Models of God*, pp. 89-187

February 2 – God in Human Experience
Watch and be prepared to discuss the film:
"Winter Light," written and directed by Ingmar Bergman
Read and be prepared to discuss:
Mark Lloyd Taylor, "Ishmael's (m)Other" (Course Reader, pp. 1-15)
Paper #1 Due

C. God in the Western Religious and Philosophical Traditions

February 9 – The Nature, Existence, and Goodness of God
Read and be prepared to discuss:
Keith Ward, *God: A Guide for the Perplexed*, pp. 241-254, 1-139

February 13 (Friday Class Session!!!!) – God and History;
the Rationality/Irrationality of Belief in God;
God as Person/Personal?
Read and be prepared to discuss:
Ward, *God: A Guide for the Perplexed*, pp. 101-254

February 16 – No Class Session, Presidents Day Holiday

February 23 – God in Human Experience
Read and be prepared to discuss:
Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*
Mark Lloyd Taylor, "The Boundless Love of God…"
(Course Reader, 17-40)
Paper #2 Due

VII. Schedule of Class Sessions and Assignments (continued)

D. God: *One* and *Three*?

March 2 – Naming the One God
Read and be prepared to discuss:
Temba Mafico, "The Divine Name *Yahweh Elohim…*"
(Course Reader, 41-48)
George Soares-Prabhu, "Laughing at Idols"
(Course Reader, 49-61)
Pablo Richard, "Theology in the Theology of Liberation"
(Course Reader, 63-73)
Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father"
(Course Reader, 75-91)

March 9 – Understanding the Trinity
Read and be prepared to discuss:
Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "God in Communion with Us,"
in *Freeing Theology*, pp. 83-114
Leonardo Boff, "Trinity" (Course Reader, 93-102)
Mark Lloyd Taylor, "The Love of God, Theology, and Human
Liberation," (Course Reader, 103-114)
Sallie McFague, "A Brief Credo," in *Life Abundant*, pp. 3-24

E. Wrapping Up and Opening Up

March 16
Integrative Discussion
Course Evaluation
Closure
Paper #3 Due