Theology and Contextuality:
Systematic Survey of Theology-Context Relationship
in Western and Non-Western Contexts

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- Course Description: This course aims to introduce the multifarious hermeneutics of the relationship between theological knowledge and cultural contexts in Christian thought. It does this by (1) presenting the major contemporary Christian approaches to the Gospel-culture or theology-context question, and (2) displaying literature on theological discourses that come from different cultural and intellectual contexts around the world. In every session, the students and the instructor will read, discuss, and assess classical and contemporary theological texts and apprehend some forms of theology done in the light of the questions and challenges of cultures and contexts from the western and the non-western settings.

- Course’s Objectives:
  At the end of the course, the students will:
  1- acquire basic knowledge about the nature of contextual theological reasoning.
  2- evaluate and learn about how western and non-western Christians think theologically in relation to their particular contextual inquiries
  3- collect basic information on Christian thinking around the world.
  4- develop their own understanding of the relation between faith and culture or theology and context.

-Required Readings: there is no single textbook for this course. Students are required to read sections from specific assigned texts in every session during the semester. The bibliographical information of these texts and the section that are required for reading therein are jotted down under every relevant session in the course’s outlines.
- Course’s Outlines and Sessions’ Reading Assignments

**I- Theology & Contextuality**

**I- Week One:**

1) Introducing the course

2) Theology as a Context-Production Phenomenon

**II- Various Approaches to Theology in Relation to Context**

**II- Week Two:**

1) Theological Reasoning as Self-Sufficient, self-referential and Indifferent to Culture (I):
   [**R.R:** K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, pp. 1-37]

2) Theological Reasoning as Self-Sufficient, Self-referential and Indifferent to Culture (II):
   [**R.R:** J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: beyond Secular Reason*, Prt. IV, Ch.12, pp. 380-406; 432-434]

**III- Week Three:**

1) Theological Reasoning in the Service of Culture (I):
   [**R.R:** G. Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, pp. 1-17]

2) Theological Reasoning in the Service of Culture (II):
   [**R.R:** Mark C Taylor, *Deconstructing Theology*, pp. 87-105]

**IV- Week Four:**

1) Theological Reasoning Selectively Borrowing from Culture (I)

2) Theological Reasoning Selectively Borrowing from Culture (II):
   [**R.R:** D. Tracey, *Blessed Rage for Order: the New Pluralism in Theology*, pp. 3-11; 43-56]
V- Week Five:

1) Theological Reasoning Correlating with and Accommodating to Culture (I):
   [R.R: F. Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, pp. 52-68]

2) Theological Reasoning Correlating with and Accommodating to Culture (II):
   [R.R: P. Tillich, Theology of Culture, pp. 3-9; 41-51; 201-208]

VI- Week Six:

1) Theological Reasoning Dialoguing with Culture from a Committed, Foundational Stand-point (I):

2) Theological Reasoning Dialoguing with Culture from a Committed, Foundational Stand-point (II):
   [R.R: George A. Lindbeck. The Nature of Doctrine, Ch. 6, pp. 112-134]

III- Theology in Relation to Various Contexts

VII- Week Seven:

1) Theology in Latin American Terms (1)
   [R.R: G. Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation, Ch. 1, pp. 3-19; and

2) Theology in Latin American Terms (2) (presentation)
   [R.R: Jon Sobrino, The True Church and the Poor, pp. 7-33]

VIII- Week Eight:

1) Theology in Black American Terms (1) (presentation)

2) Theology in African Terms (2) (presentation)

IX-Week Nine:

1) Theology in Far-Eastern Terms (1)
   [R.R: A. Pieris, SJ. An Asian Theology of Liberation, pp. 69-71; 81- 86; 111-121; 124-126.]
2) Theology in Far-Eastern Terms (2)  
(presentation)

X- Week Ten:

1) Theology in Indian Terms (1)  

2) Theology in Indian Terms (2)  
(presentation)

[Reading Days + Passover…Reading Days + Passover…Reading Days] + Passover

XI- Week Eleven:

1) Theology in Arabic Terms (1)  
(presentation)

2) Theology in Arabic Terms (2)  
(presentation)

XII- Week Twelve:

1) Theology in Feminist & Gender Terms (1)  

2) Theology in Feminist & Gender Terms (2)  
[R.R: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals*, pp. 53-79]  
(presentation)

XIII- Week Thirteen:

1) Theology in Queer Terms  
(presentation)
Concluding Remarks on Contextual Theology

2) Theology in the Public Sphere: Public Theology
   
   [R.R: Sebastian Kim, *Theology in the Public Sphere*, pp. 3-26]

XIV - Week Fourteen:

1) Is the Gospel Always embedded in Culture?
   

2) Conclusion & Evaluation

- Course Requirements and Assessment Expectations

1) **Assigned readings’ preparation and active class participation:** Students are required to read these texts as thoroughly and critically as they can and then to demonstrate an active class participation by coming to the sessions with questions or comments on them and the taught materials therein.

2) **Presentation:** the students are required to prepare a presentation for the readings of the sessions of ‘Theology in Relation to Various Contexts’ section. The instructor would ask the students to sign in for the required presentations during the first introductory session of the course. The presentation must be no more than **45 minutes** long. The second 45 minutes of the session would be spent in open discussion between the presenter and the classmates over the texts and aspects related to their subject. The students are free to use any audio-visual or material they need to perform their presentation. Every presenter must:

   A- present the content of the readings perceptively and coherently and to make sure that every main argument in the texts have been given fair presentation before his/her class-mates.

   B- give his/her own appraisal and point of view on the text’s understanding of theology and its relation to the cultural context.

   C- attend to the questions of the classmates in a way that would invite for further class discussion on the studied theological sample.

3) **Book Appraisal:** students are required to write an up to 3000 words-long (aprox. 6-7 pages-long) **book appraisal** on one of the following texts:

The book appraisals must be submitted to the instructor via email definitely on the seventh week of the course’s classes, **Wed, Mar. 4, 2015**

4) **Short Reflection Paper:** students must write a short reflection paper (4000-5000 words-long/ 8-10 pages-long) on the following question:

In your opinion, how is the centralization of context is relevant/irrelevant to theological reasoning? And how do you think such an attention to contextuality is related to today’s religious belief: does it make religiosity better; does it make it worse; does it jeopardize the content of faith; or does it rather reform it?

Students are expected to use any academic literature they read during the course, or they find in the bibliography, in developing their own reflective answers to this inquiry. The should also submit the reflection paper to the instructor via email at the last week of the course, **Week Fourteen.**

- **Grading Division:**

  1- reading’s preparation and class participation (all) (20%)
  2- presentation (30%)
  3- book appraisal (20%)
  4- reflection paper: (30%)

The students can find their course’s grade posted in SONISWEB starting from **June, 2017.**

- **Additional Policies:**

  1) **Attendance:** Attendance in class is required. If you know you will be unable to attend a class session please inform the professor in advance. Missing two sessions will result in an automatic lowering of your final grade by 10%. Missing more than three sessions without any explanation or permission will result in automatic failure of the course.

  2) **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the failure to give proper credit for the words or ideas of another person, whether published or unpublished, and is strictly prohibited. Credit will not be given for written work in this course containing plagiarism, and plagiarism may result in a failing grade for the entire course. Please consult the Plagiarism Policy on pp. 56-57 of the Hartford Seminary Catalogue 2011-2012, and/or contact the instructor with questions in this regard.
Selected Bibliography

The books enlisted here are by no means exhaustive of all the available literature on the themes and method of doing Theology in relation to context. Students are encouraged to look for other primary and secondary literature and to use every theological book they believe is helpful.


