Theology and Contextuality: Systematic Survey of Theology-Context Relationship

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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 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.

- **Course’s Object in Relation to the Study Program (MA #1):**
  At the end of the course the students would have the chance to
  1. To acquire foundational and critical knowledge of Christian religion.
  2. To accumulate knowledge of the practices of Christian religious tradition.
  3. To acquire knowledge and skills for dialogical and constructive engagement with diversity.
- **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 (Jan 18-24, 2020):** Introduction: Theology as a Context-Production Phenomenon

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

  **II-Week Two (Jan 25-31, 2020):** Theological Reasoning as Self-Sufficient, self-referential and Indifferent to Culture (I):
  
  [R.R: K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, pp. 1-37]

  **III- Week Three (Feb 1-7, 2020):** Theological Reasoning as Self-Sufficient, Self-referential and Indifferent to Culture (II):
  

  **IV- Week Four (Feb 8-14, 2020):** Theological Reasoning in Service of Culture (I):
  

  **V- Week Five (Feb 15-21, 2020):** Theological Reasoning in Service of Culture (II):
  
  [R.R: Mark C Taylor, *Deconstructing Theology*, pp. 87-105]

  **VI- Week Six (Feb 22-28, 2020):** Theological Reasoning Selectively Borrowing from Culture (I)
  

  **VII- Week Seven (Feb 28- Mar 6, 2020):** Theological Reasoning Selectively Borrowing from Culture (II):
  

  **VIII- Week Eight (Mar 7-13, 2020):** Theological Reasoning Correlating with and Accommodating to Culture (I):
  
IX- Week Nine (Mar 14- 20, 2020): Theological Reasoning Correlating with and Accommodating to Culture(II):

[R.R: P. Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, pp. 3-9; 41-51; 201-208]

III- Theology in Relation to Various Contexts

X- Week Ten (Mar 21- 27, 2020): Theology in Latin American Terms


XI- Week Eleven (Mar 28- Apr 3, 2020): Theology in Black American Terms


XII-Week Twelve (Apr 11- 17, 2020): Theology in Indian Terms


XIII- Week Thirteen (Apr 18- Apr. 24, 2020): Theology in Arabic Terms


XIV- Week Fourteen (Apr 25- May 1, 2020): Is the Gospel Always embedded in Culture?


- 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 active participation by coming with questions or comments on them and the taught materials therein.

2) **Term Paper:** students must write a short reflection paper (4000-5000 words-long/ 10-12 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. They should also submit the reflection paper to the instructor via email no later than May 10, 2020, 10:00 pm.

- Grading Division:
1- Weekly discussion (all) (70%)
3- Term paper: (30%)

- Grading Criterion
Students are graded using the A, B, C, or F system, with “+” and “−” markings allowed. For purposes of this course, these grades mean:

A (95-100) Demonstrates excellent mastery of the subject matter, a superior ability to articulate this, and provides helpful connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
A- (90-94) Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, ability to articulate this well, and makes connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
B+(87-89) Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course.
B (83-86) Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.
B-(80-82) Demonstrates an understanding of the material at hand, has some difficulty articulating this, and basic connection of the material to daily life or contemporary issues/life. Meets basic expectations for the course.
C+(77-79) Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.
C (70-76) Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.
F (below 70) Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

Auditors are welcome to participate in discussion and assignments to the degree they wish and should clarify their intent with the instructor, but their work will not be graded.

- Additional Policies:
1) **Attendance:** Active 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 three or more sessions will result in automatic failure of the course. 3 - 4 or more absences --- without a serious reason should be an automatic failure.

2) **Plagiarism:** Academic honesty and integrity are expected of all students. Plagiarism exists when: a) the work submitted was done, in whole or in part, by anyone other than the one submitting the work, b) parts of the work, whether direct quotations, ideas, or data, are taken from another source without acknowledgement, c) the whole work is copied from another source [especially a web based source], or d) significant portions of one’s own previous work used in another course. See “Plagiarism” at [http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/](http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/)

3) **Appropriate Classroom Etiquette and Use of Technology:** In order to respect the community within the classroom: 1) Mute all cell phones during class; 2) Utilize laptops for the sole purpose of taking class notes. Please do not surf the web, email, or other programs during class time. Such use of the computer during class is disrespectful of the class and professor, and may result in lowering your participation grade.

4) **Inclusive Language:** Hartford Seminary is committed to a policy of inclusion in its academic life and mission. All members of the community are expected to communicate in language that reflects the equality of genders, openness to diverse cultural and theological perspectives, and sensitivity to one another’s images of God.

5) **Extensions:** Extensions for papers will be given for illnesses or family emergencies only in consultation with the instructor.

**-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.

Hennelly, Alfred T (ed. & Trans.). Liberation Theology: A documentary History, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis
Raheb, Mitri, “Sailing through Troubled Waters: Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land,” in *Dialog: A


