

1-1-2008

ST 650 Public Theology for Changing Times

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Recommended Citation

Edgar, Brian G., "ST 650 Public Theology for Changing Times" (2008). *Syllabi*. Book 58.
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Asbury Theological Seminary

Public Theology for Changing Times
ST650

Preliminary Syllabus

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Summer, 2008

Important Notice

1. Note that this is a revised but still preliminary syllabus and while the information regarding texts etc can be relied upon a **more complete syllabus** prescribing reading and assignments will be made available later.
2. This syllabus contains information concerning reading **required prior to the intensive.**
3. An Asbury Virtual Seminary web-site for this course (designated ST650 (S308)) will be available to all enrolled students two weeks before the start of the intensive. This site will give access to electronic resources and which may provide other information which may be relevant to the intensive. **You should visit this site at least a week prior to the intensive.**

COURSE DETAILS

Hours: 1: *Note that, regrettably, there has been some confusion about the credit hours. This course can only be offered as 1 credit hour. It contributes to the Christian Ethics Core but cannot, by itself, satisfy all requirements in that area.*

Sessions: 8.30am to 4.30pm on 21 and 22 August, 2008.

Pre-reading: approximately 200-300 pages of required and recommended reading to be completed prior to the commencement of the classes. See below for further detail.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the current state of public theology.
2. To identify contemporary challenges and opportunities facing the church in its engagement with the public square.
3. To encourage students in the development of public theological thinking by providing a basic outline of essential principles.

COURSE CONTENT

The course will begin with an introduction to the contemporary world of public theology and will be developed via accounts of the life and thought of noted public theologians of the past.

These stories will be utilized to introduce the essential biblical and theological principles of public theology and the course will then move towards helping students develop an outline of their own approach.

The course will therefore cover the following areas:

1. **What is public theology?** Defining public theology
2. **Visions of church and society:** a selective biographical history of public theology ranging from the early fathers (Diognetus, Justin, Augustine, Chrysostom etc) and other distinctive periods (with a focus on Wesleyanism) through to the twentieth/twenty-first century (Kuyper, Niebuhr, Newbigin, Yoder, Sider etc).
3. **An overview of biblical principles for public theology** utilizing Old Testament perspectives (on social transformation: the Genesis mandate; the Exodus paradigm; structural justice in the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee; the Old Testament Prophetic tradition etc) and New Testament concepts (Christ; Cross; Baptism; Spirit; Church; Power etc) and their application outside the church, in the public realm.
4. **Issues in our world:** focusing on the issues relating to the presence of different worldviews and ideologies. Public ministry in a complex and changing world.
5. **Ministering as a public theologian:** a initial consideration of the role of the *pastor* as 'public theologian' and the responsibilities of *individuals* in their workplace and the *corporate ministry of the church* in terms of an intellectual calling to the world.

COURSE ASSESSMENTS

The assessment is one 1500 word paper (with an absolute maximum of 1800 words) on **one** of the following topics.

1. What are the aims, strengths, dangers and limitations of public theology?
2. What are the essential elements of a methodology for public theology?
3. Does public theology have a role within the local congregation?
4. Give a critique of the overall approach to public theology undertaken in R. Sider and D. Knippers (eds), *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy* (Baker, 2005)

5. Another topic on a related issue of your own devising but which is approved by me in advance. If you wish to devise your own topic please submit it to me for consideration *in writing*.

The due date for this assignment is **5pm Friday September 12**. This is three weeks after the conclusion of the intensive. Assignments will be graded by September 19. Because this intensive comes at the end of the Summer term the assignment due date extends beyond the time when grades normally have to be submitted (one week after the end of the intensive). Not to extend in this way would mean that the assignment would, in reality, have to be completed *prior* to the intensive so that I would have time to grade it immediately after the intensive finished. This extension means that you can take some time after the intensive to complete the assignment, but it also means that you will have an "in process" reported on your transcripts until the grades are posted. This extension has had to be negotiated with the administration and there can be no exceptions which go beyond it. So, depending on your circumstances, you might feel that it would be helpful to do some preliminary work prior to the intensive.

If you need this course to graduate in August however, you cannot follow this timetable! You will need to do what is a little more difficult and submit your assignment on the first day of the intensive (21st August). If you are in this category please let me know. Those in that category should contact me when they start work on the paper. I can provide some additional help and checking prior to submission.

REQUIRED TEXTS

In the initial syllabus the following text was set as required reading:

Holmes, Stephen R. (ed), *Public Theology in Cultural Engagement: God's Key to the Redemption of the World* (Paternoster, 2008)

I was advised by the publisher that this would be available in April 2008 but at the time of writing this it is June and it will not be available for some time. Consequently **I have to remove it from the reading list**

Consequently the reading that you are **required** to complete prior to the intensive is:

(a) Sider, Ronald J, and Diane Knippers (eds), *Toward and Evangelical Public Policy: political strategies for the health of the nation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) pages 9-212 and 307-341.

It is *recommended* that you also read pages 213-306 but these are not required prior to the intensive.

(b) Also **required** for reading prior to the intensive are the following articles which can be accessed via Asbury Scholar. You are to read at least two of them. You should read Hunsberger which is the simplest of the three) and at least one of the other two.

Hunsberger, George R., 'The mission of public theology: an exploration' *Svensk missionstidskrift*, Vol. 93 No 3 (2005), 315-324.

Breitenberg, E Harold, Jr., 'To tell the truth: will the real public theology please stand up?' *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Vol. 23 No 2 (Fall-Wint 2003), 55-96.

Stackhouse, Max L., 'Public Theology and Ethical Judgment' *Theology Today*, Vol. 54 No 2 (JI 1997), 165-179.

To access these articles go to Asbury Scholar and insert 'public' in the title field, the author's surname in the 'author' field, the publication date in the appropriate field and select only the ATLA Religion Database™ with ATLASerials™ database.