IS 501 Christian Formation: Kingdom, Church and World

Brian G. Edgar
Course: IS501 X1 (SP 2009)
Title: Christian Formation: Kingdom, Church and World
Hours: 3.00
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Prerequisites: None

Department: Integrative Studies
Faculty: Dr. Brian Edgar

Email: brian.edgar@asburyseminary.edu
Office: EXL EXL
SPO:

Meetings:
During 02/09/2009 to 05/22/2009 Online via ExL.

Maximum Registration: 27

Catalog Description: What is the mission of the church? Behind this question is a cluster of related questions, the most important focused on the nature of God’s creative and redemptive purpose (as this is expressed in the biblical story), its ongoing expression in the world, and its consummation in the eschaton. Participants in this course will explore how the church might discern, embrace, and participate in God’s own mission.

Objectives:

ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
KINGDOM, CHURCH, WORLD
- IS 501 XL-

Syllabus

Dr. Brian Edgar,
Professor of Theological Studies
Spring Semester, 2009

We have, in this course, an opportunity to critically examine our presuppositions, our theories, and the way we live out our lives in regard to the nature of the Kingdom of God, the Church, and the World. We will consider issues that will examine these realities and give opportunity to ask a variety of questions, such as:

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. How are we to participate as the Church in God’s mission to the World?

The course places a high priority on the integration of thinking, feeling, and action – on the interweaving of theory and practice. So let’s
begin to ask together what it means to be the people of God? What does it mean to be those distinct people that bear witness to the grace and power that is ours through the work and mission of God?

The development of this syllabus and all course materials is a product of a collaborative effort by the Kingdom, Church, and World faculty committee. This course is team taught and team developed. The syllabi, therefore, for the various sections of the course might be similar in content and design. This team design is foundational for our thinking together.

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Course Description
What is the mission of the church? Behind this question is a cluster of related questions, the most important focused on the nature of God’s creative and redemptive purpose (as this is expressed in the biblical story), its ongoing expression in the world, and its consummation in the eschaton. Participants in this course will explore how the church might discern, embrace, and participate in God’s own mission.

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. While there is a sense in which much of this whole syllabus is intended to answer that question, this course can be further characterized 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 canonical 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, we 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 integrates theological reflection and biblically informed practice and demonstrates its significance for the faithful performance of scripture by God’s people “thinking” and “living” theologically, biblically, and holistically. Issues of importance include:

1. What does it mean to refer to the biblical materials as “narrative”? How is one to understand the relation of “part” and “whole” when interpreting the biblical narratives? What constitutes a biblical “meta-narrative”? Is there only one or are there multiple ones? What role do these meta-narratives play?
2. What role does the kingdom of God play in the scriptural story?
3. What does the biblical narrative tell us about God’s mission (the missio dei)?
4. How does the biblical narrative subvert our familiar ways of being, thinking and acting in the world?
5. What is the role of culture in shaping our own understanding of scripture, mission and ministry?
6. How does Wesleyan theology understand scripture, the kingdom of God, and participation 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, not simply as individuals, but as members of his Church. This may be dis-orienting from time to time, but know that it will also be re-orienting. Keep in mind our end goal: to understand more fully what we understand ourselves to be as people of God, the Church, and to understand what it means to be in God’s service in the world as agents of God’s kingdom mission in the world.

Course Outcomes
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:

Required Reading:
Jenkins, Philip, The Next Christendom: the coming of global Christianity, Oxford University Press, 2002
Wright, Tom. The Challenge of Jesus, Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity or London: SPCK, 1999

Please note: these readings will be supplemented from time-to-time with materials available electronically. The IS501 Small Group Packet which some classes use for this course is not required as the reading in that packet is available electronically.

The following material which will be available electronically is required reading:

John Wesley, A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist, also currently available at http://www.godrules.net/library/wesley/274wesley_h6.htm

John Wesley, An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion also currently available at http://www.godrules.net/library/wesley/274wesley_h2.htm

John Wesley, A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion also currently available at http://www.godrules.net/library/wesley/274wesley_h3.htm

John Wesley, Thoughts on Methodism

John Wesley, The Character of the Methodist also currently available at http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/character/


Recommended Texts:

Recommended Reading:
Budde, Michael and Robert Brimlow, Christianity Incorporated: How Big Business is Buying the Church. Brazos Press 2002
Hart, Trevor. Faith Thinking, InterVarsity, 1995
Hauerwas, Stanley. A Community of Character, University of Notre Dame,
Hauerwas, Stanley and Will Willimon. Resident Aliens, Abingdon Press, 1989
Middleton, J. Richard and Brian J. Walsh, Truth is Stranger than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age. InterVarsity Press, 1995
Robert, Dana, Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century. Orbis, 2002
Stackhouse, Max. The Church in a Global Era, Eerdmans,
Snyder, Howard, Kingdom, Church, and World: Biblical Themes for Today. Wipf & Stock. (Originally published as A Kingdom Manifesto, 1985, InterVarsity Press.)
Walker, Andrew. Telling the Story, Wipf and Stock Publishers,

Course Requirements:

Course Assessment:
Students will be required to undertake a variety of assessments. Further information is provided during the semester but students may
wish to note the following prior to the commencement of the semester.

(a) **Students will undertake various forms of written work and interactions in group discussion.** Further information on this is provided at the start of the semester. However, anyone wishing to start reading prior to the beginning of the semester should note the following:

A. You are to read Wright on "The Challenge of Jesus". You will need to submit a responses answering, in only a couple of hundred words altogether, the following questions: 1. If Jesus remains anchored in the first century Judaism, as Wright suggests, does not his relevance for us today diminish? (This refers particularly to the material in chapters 1 to 3); 2. What, according to Wright is, and is not, the significance of the resurrection for understanding Jesus? (This refers particularly to the material in chapters 4-6); 3. What is the relationship between our present work in reshaping our world, and the future world that God intends to make? (This refers particularly to the material in chapters 7-8.)

B. You are to read the "The Drama of Scripture: finding our place in the biblical story" by Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen. This book is an introduction to the full sweep of the story of God and his relationship to the world. It contains a lot of detail (especially in 'Act 3') but you should be concerned more with the overall sweep of history. For each chapter, write a few sentences that try to capture what Bartholomew is communicating to you. Name significant issues that you think he raises and then write a short discussion of the implications of this approach for Christian formation and discipleship. This piece of work will not be graded.

C: Read the book 'The Open Secret' by Lesslie Newbigin and, in 150-200 words, respond to one central point from the book, stating what that point is, discussing its implications for the mission of the church and noting any problems with it.

D: Read 'A Peculiar People' and make a 200 word response briefly describing the central point(s) of one of the chapters 3-12 and then respond to it/them by (for example) examining the implications, critiquing the argument and commending strengths.

E: You need to read Philip Jenkins, “The Next Christendom”. This is a substantial book. You will need to read quickly. And by saying that I do not mean to treat it lightly (in fact, if done properly speed reading can enhance comprehension). But it deals with a huge subject. This book has been widely discussed. Every Christian needs to have a global perspective. A failure to understand the world is disastrous! You have two tasks relating to this book. (a) The first is to make a posting to the Transforming the World Discussion Forum making an initial comment on Jenkins book; (b) The second is to provide a 200-300 word assessment and critique of the 'big picture' of the whole book.

F: Read 'The Shaping of Things to Come' by Frost and Hirsch. Your report on this book is required but is one of the ones not assessed. Please respond to three questions: (a) In 100 words or less comment on/critique/assess one of chapters 3, 4, 5 or 6; (b) In 100 words or less comment on/critique/assess one of chapters 7, 8 or 9; (c) In 100 words or less comment on/critique/assess one of chapters 10, 11, 12.

(b) **Students will undertake a Kingdom Project and Reflection Paper.** For the Kingdom Project students will spend a minimum of 12 hours participating in a group ministry (with other Christians) of some kind that touches the lives of those outside of the church with the presence of the Kingdom of God. This project should be one serving the marginalized: poor, oppressed, etc. It should include face to face interaction with persons, preferably non-Christian persons. Students are encouraged to do the project with a group (accountability group, family, small group from church, etc.). Possibilities for the Kingdom Project may include a ministry within which a student is already participating if approved by the professor. Each student must confirm the project with the professor prior to beginning to work on it. You should begin thinking about your project as soon as possible. Near the end of the semester, each student will write a Kingdom Project Reflection Paper. The goal of the paper is to integrate experiences received through the kingdom project with the reading and discussion done for this class. Specific instructions for this paper will be posted in the course center.

(c) **Students will visit a church other than their own.** At some time during this semester you should attend a church other than your own. There is a strong preference for this to be a church you have not attended previously. For some people, who have responsibilities in their own congregation, this can be difficult. But if you really cannot get free from your regular services you should try to attend at some other time - churches offer services at various times during the week. Please go as a participant, not just an observer. And as you go it may be possible for you to consider what you can offer (e.g. your prayers; friendship; a greeting; an invitation for others to return the visit to your church; etc). But please do observe what happens and write up a report relating your experience visiting this church with what you have been thinking about during this subject. The report will be made available to other students. Your report should include: 1. Basic information about the church: name; denomination; type of service; number and nature of participants as far as you can observe (e.g. socio-economic background); 2. Brief outline of the worship service (what it involved; the ethos or style etc); 3. Observations on the following: 1. The nature of the church in relation to the kingdom of God; 2. The concept of mission; 3. The character of Christians; 4. The character of God; 5. The relationship of the church to culture; 6. And anything else that you think is important. These are not 'easy' or trite issues. I do not expect a lot written, and you may have to think carefully to see what connections there are.