IS 501 Christian Formation: Kingdom, Church, and World

Ruth Anne Reese

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Introduction: Welcome to the fall session of Kingdom, Church, and World. This course is an opportunity to critically examine our presuppositions and commitments regarding the nature of the kingdom of God and its relationship to the church and world. These are three distinct, but intimately related aspects of the reality in which we all live and engage in ministry—whether we be laypersons or clergy—and this class gives us an opportunity to examine and think through them.

In this course we will have the opportunity to reflect on a number of questions and issues including:

1. What is the kingdom of God?
2. What is the Church?
3. How does and should the Church engage the world?
4. What do we mean when we speak of “the world?”
5. What relationship exists between the kingdom, the Church, and the world?

There will be other questions that you will raise as well. This class is an introduction to various aspects of theology, biblical study, philosophy, anthropology, ecclesiology and mission. The topics that the course can touch upon are vast. In light of this, it is good to remember that this is an introductory course that is designed to give you a taste of the curriculum that lies ahead in theological study.

Course Rationale: It is altogether reasonable to ask why a particular course is required. There is a sense in which this entire syllabus is intended to answer that question, but this course has 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 such as “kingdom.” In this regard, this course integrates theological reflection and biblically informed practice and demonstrates its significance for God’s people.

Course Objectives: Having successfully completed this course, students should be able to

1. Articulate their understanding of the biblical 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 narrative;
3. Draw out major theological, moral, and philosophical implications of this 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 narrative;
5. Exercise criticism with respect to one’s own cultural context and discernment with respect to the context of others vis-à-vis major theological, moral, and philosophical implications of this narrative;
6. Articulate the ecclesial and missional implications of this 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.

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**Evaluation:**
- Active and Substantive Participation in Small Groups (10 points)
  The small group will meet every Wednesday from 4:25–5:15 p.m. for reflection and discussion of the small group material. Each person in the group is expected to lead the group’s work twice during the semester.
- One Page Book Evaluations (15 points)
  Each student will turn in a one-page single spaced reflection paper for each book that is read. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the day assigned. The papers are to be turned in at the beginning of class AND are to be posted in your team folders. Students will respond to at least one of their teammates in the team folder
Instructions for these papers: 1. Give a one-sentence statement of what the book is about. 2. Write a short paragraph describing the author’s argument? 2. Explain how the book relates to the course objectives. 3. What did you learn from this book? 4. What issues concerns or questions would you like to see discussed? 5. Give 3 consequences or implications for ministry.

Instructions for responses to your teammates: Ask questions or make comments about your teammates’ papers. These might include such things as: What intrigues you? What raises questions? What discussion do you want to enter into? What challenges you? You are also free to raise your own questions/comments and do not have to make use of these.

- Kingdom Project and Presentation (10 points)
  Each student in each group is required to spend 12 hours of personal work/involvement in a “Kingdom Project.” This project is a group project that must be completed together. In order to facilitate this project, a list of local ministries and resources will be provided. However, groups are also encouraged to find other suitable (in consultation with professor) churches, para-church organizations, social service agencies, and community related organizations where they may complete the Kingdom Project. After completion of Kingdom Project, each group will share its experience with the class. All kingdom projects must be cleared with either the professor or the teaching intern (Randy Shrauner).

- Kingdom Project reflection (written): (10 points)
  Each member of each group will write a personal reflection of his/her experience in the project in the light of class readings and lectures. The goal of this paper is to integrate your experience of doing the kingdom project with the theological reading and work done in class. Please write no less than 3 (three) and no more than 5 (five) pages and the reflection must be typed or printed with 12 point type, one inch margins on all four sides, and true double spacing. Any paper receiving less than 5 points can be rewritten as instructed by the professor. On a separate sheet of paper at the end of the reflection paper, the student will list the amount of hours completed in each location.

- Mid-Term (30 points)
  Take-home, open-book exam;

- Final-Exam (25 points)
  In-class

Grading: Work for IS501 will be evaluated at a graduate/professional school level. The grading scale is as follows

A = 94-100  Exceptional Work
A- = 90–93
B+ = 87–89
B = 83–86  Good Work
B- = 80–82
C+ = 77–79
C = 73–76  Acceptable Work
C- = 70–72
D+ = 67–69
D = 63–66  Marginal Work
D= 60–62
F = 59 and below Failing Work

**Incomplete Work:** “A grade of ‘I’ denotes that the work of a course has not been completed due to an *unavoidable emergency*, which does not include delinquency or attending to church work or other employment. If the work of the course is incomplete at the end of a term without an emergency, a letter grade will be given based on the grades of work done, with incomplete work counted as ‘F.’” From ATS 2003-05 Catalog, page 28 (emphasis added).

**Attendance Policy:** One week of class may be missed without makeup. After one week, extra reading is required (50 pages per day missed: from the recommended reading list) and a one page single-spaced paper summarizing the extra reading. If three weeks are missed, a conversation with the professor is needed and there will be a reduction of grade. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that the attendance sheet is marked prior to leaving class. The professor will not change the record after the class has been marked as missed. Any questions arising should be addressed to the professor immediately and should not be left until the end of the semester.

**Small Groups:** In the first week of class students will be assigned to a small group. This group will be an essential part of the class. This group will: (1) share in a “Wesley-type” accountability group, (2) discuss small group reading material, and (3) work together on a Kingdom Project.

The purpose of small groups in KCW is to provide formation in the Wesleyan tradition of nurture and accountability and to be a place where academic discussion and growth in spiritual disciplines mutually inform each other and contribute to how we manifest a kingdom witness in the Church and in the world.

**Guidelines for Group Meetings:**
1. Because Christian living and witness are important aspects of this course, the group experience is built into our weekly class time so that no one has to find time for an additional meeting outside of class.
2. The purpose of this group is to hold each other accountable for growth in grace, to share insights from the weekly disciplines, and to encourage each other toward living faithfully as witnesses to the kingdom and the lordship of Christ in our lives.
3. One student in each group will take attendance and email it weekly to randy_shrauner@asburyseminary.edu. Please note that if you miss more than three sessions (for whatever reasons), you will not receive credit for this component of the course.
4. Each person should complete the assigned readings before coming to class.
5. Each group should covenant to keep group conversations confidential.
Course Schedule

Introduction
Week 1. Introduction and Organization of the Course
- Small Groups: Selection, Process, Leadership, and Expectations
- Course Objectives
- Course Procedures

Module One: Kingdom – Living the Biblical Story
Weeks 2-5
Objectives
Having completed this module, students should be able to:
1. Articulate the importance of “story;”
2. Discern how cultural products participate in inviting us into certain stories;
3. Articulate the unity of Scripture in the overarching plan of God, from Creation to New Creation;
4. Articulate the hermeneutical importance of the kingdom and of the incarnation for understanding the biblical story;
5. Articulate how Wesley’s understanding of the way of salvation serves as a helpful guide for reading the biblical story.

Module Two: Kingdom and Church
Weeks 6-8
Objectives
Having completed this module, students should be able to:
1. Enumerate significant ways in which the ongoing life of the people of God participates in and extends the biblical story;
2. Articulate how kingdom-living relates to a community of believers;
3. Articulate an ecclesiology oriented around participation in the kingdom;
4. Articulate basic forms of ecclesial practice (e.g., hospitality and mission) that are a necessary outgrowth of an ecclesial commitment to living in the kingdom.

Module Three: Kingdom, Church, and World
Weeks 9-13
Objectives
Having completed this module, students should be able to:
1. Articulate the significance of the kingdom in terms of its cosmological and eschatological significance (rather than in individual and subjective terms);
2. Demonstrate that they have begun the process of thinking theologically – i.e., situating life within the interpretive and critical horizons of a theological vision of the purpose of God for creation that comes into focus best in Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom;
3. Draw out inferences of this view of the kingdom with respect to a range of social-ethical issues (e.g., money, justice, nationalism);
4. Demonstrate the importance of understanding one’s world in performing the kingdom;
Reading and Assignment Schedule

Week 1—Sept 7
Introduction
Reading to be completed for Sept 14: Begin reading Bartholomew
Small Group Assignment for Sept 14: Read Wesley’s *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist* and come prepared for discussion with your group

Module One: Kingdom
Week 2 — Sept 14
Kingdom: Introduction to Postmodernism and Narrative
Reading to be completed for Sept 21: Finish reading Bartholomew
Small Group Assignment for Sept 21: Read Deut 5; Psalm 106; Acts 7; Hebrews 11

Week 3 — Sept 21
Kingdom: The Old Testament Narrative
Due: 1 page book review of Bartholomew
Reading to be completed for Sept 28: Begin reading Walsh

Week 4 — Sept 28
Kingdom: The New Testament Narrative
Reading to be completed for Oct 5: Finish reading Walsh
Small Group Assignment for Oct 5: Read selections from Wesley’s *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* and *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*

Week 5 — Oct 5
Kingdom: The Trinity and the Wesleyan Order of Salvation
Due: 1 page book review of Walsh
Reading to be completed for Oct 12: Begin reading Hauerwas and Willimon
Small Group Assignment for Oct 12: Read Exodus 19; Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 12

Module Two: Church
Week 6 — Oct 12
Church: Who are the People of God?
Due: Mid-Term
Reading to be completed for Oct 19: Finish reading Hauerwas and Willimon
Small Group Assignment for Oct 19: Work through questions on Hauerwas

Week 7 — Oct 19 (*Kingdom Conference*)
Church: The People of God through History
Reading to be completed for Oct 26: Begin reading Volf and Bass, pp. ???
Small Group Assignment for Oct 26: Work through questions on Hauerwas

Week 8 — Oct 26
Church: The People of God in the Contemporary Context
Due: 1 page book review of Hauerwas and Willimon  
Reading to be completed for Nov 2: Finish reading Volf and Bass, pp. ???  
Small Group Assignment for Nov 2: Read Genesis 1-2; John 1:1-18; Acts 10-11

Module Three: World  
Week 9 — Nov 2  
  World: Listening to the world  
    Due: 1 page book review of Volf and Bass  
    Reading to be completed for Nov 2: Begin reading Clapp, pp. ???  
    Small Group Assignment for Nov 2: Reread the last 8 pages of A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist and read Wesley’s Thoughts Upon Methodism

Week 10 — Nov 9  
  World: Acting in the world – Justice  
  Due: 1 page book review of Volf  
  Reading: Finish reading Clapp, pp. ???  
  Small Group Assignment for Nov 9: Read Mathew 28:16-20; John 13; Acts 4 and Wesley’s sermon The General Spread of the Gospel

Week 11 — Nov 16  
  Due: 1 page book review of Clapp  
  World: Acting in the world  
  Small Group Assignment for Nov 16: Read kingdom project presentations.

Reading Week Nov 21-25

Week 12 — Nov 30  
  World: Speaking to the world  
  Due: Kingdom Project presentations and papers  
  Reading: Prepare for the final exam  
  Final Small Group Meeting

Week 13 — Dec 7  
  World: Speaking in the world—The Witness of the Worshipping Community  
  Reading: Prepare for the final exam

Final Exam

Important issues include:  
1. What constitutes a biblical narrative? Is there more than one?  
2. What role does the kingdom of God play in the scripture?  
3. How is one to understand the relationship of “part” and “whole” when interpreting biblical narrative and church history?  
4. What is the role of culture in shaping our own understanding of mission and ministry?
5. How does biblical narrative subvert our familiar ways of being, thinking and acting in the world?
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 keep in mind our end goal: to understand more fully who we are as the people of God and what it means to be in his service in the world as representatives of his kingdom.