Course Syllabus
THEO5140:
Advanced Seminar in Theologies of Disability, Church, and Sacrament
North Park Theological Seminary
Spring 2019, Thursdays, 1:30-4:15 p.m.
3 credit-hours (campus)

Instructor Information

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Course Identification

Course Number: THEO5140
Course Name: Theologies of Disability, Church, and Sacrament
Course Format: In-class (some online content; see below)
Course Location: *N20, Nyvall Hall
Class Times: Thursdays, 1:30-4:15 p.m.
Prerequisites: THEO5110, Intro to Christian Theology

Course Description:

In this course, students will begin to construct their own theologies of disability, in creative dialogue with questions raised by significant historical and contemporary theologians. The course will explore the way that the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion empower people of diverse abilities to be part of the church, and the ways that human bodies impact past and present Christologies, ecclesiologies, and eschatologies, as well as theologies of sin and theologies of the Holy Spirit. It will also investigate how our theologies of disability impact pastoral and theological questions of eroticism, physical violence, gender inequality, racism, and medical ethics. Students’ work will be assessed via weekly participation, short theological essays, a book-review, a brief accessibility audit, and an integrative essay. This course will follow NPTS’s grading-scale, and will attend carefully to the Seminary’s outcomes for Scripture, Tradition, and Worship.

Course Objectives for North Park Seminary Students:

General Academic Skills:

• Identify and interpret the Church’s mission to people of all body-types in terms of Covenant and systematic theologies.
• Analyze and interpret the relationships among Christian life, ministry, and theologies of disability, within Covenant theology.
• Examine historical and contemporary theologies of disability, in order to connect them to discourses concerning social justice, peace, environmental stewardship, and healing.
• Discuss contextual challenges to the bodies of human beings within the Church, and address those challenges using theological reflection and pastoral experience.
• Create and implement a brief accessibility audit of a Seminary space.
Guiding Questions for this Course:

1. How do we construct our theologies of disability, and whom do they benefit?
2. What is ableism, and how does it shape our paradigms of bodies of diverse abilities?
3. What do inclusion, and an inclusive Church, look like?
4. Where do the sacraments fit into an ecclesiology of disability?
5. What is the role of Jesus Christ in such an ecclesiology?
6. How can the Church help people to give voice to their pain?
7. How can an inclusive and sacramental Church offer people glimpses of God’s Reign?

Required Books (rough page count: 400 pp.):


Required Online Readings (Canvas: rough page count: 710 pp.):


Swinton, John. Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), chs. 4 and 6.


Yong, Amos. Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimaging Disability in Late Modernity (Waco: Baylor, 2007), excerpts (chapters 1, 3, 8, and 9).

Recommended (but NOT REQUIRED) Reading:


**Course Method and Evaluation**

In-class lectures (the lecture notes will be made available online); classroom discussion and in-class pastoral integrative exercises; two short essays; one accessibility audit; one book-review; one integrative essay.

1. **Short Paper: A Personal Theology of Disability**  
   **January 24th, 2019**

   Using the guiding questions provided at the end of this syllabus as a guide, explain your personal theology of disability in 450-500 words. Write as concisely and effectively as possible! *This paper does not require outside research:* you need not consult any sources outside of your own understanding of your body and its relation to theological reflection. This paper is meant to help you voice your convictions about your body as a foundation for your in-class learning. **Weight: 10% of final grade.**

2. **Short Paper: A Revised Theology of the Body**  
   **February 7th, 2019**

   Continuing to use the Guiding Questions, while also reflecting on the readings we’ve done in class, set out your revised theology of disability in 450-500 words. Again, be as concise and to the point as you can be! Discuss how your views have stayed the same, changed, expanded, become clearer, and so on. While you need not consult your first paper to complete this exercise, please keep it in your mind. Again, this paper is meant to help you in your reflection on your theology of the body. **Weight: 15% of final grade.**

3. **Book Review**  
   **March 7th, 2019**

   In 1200-1500 words, review one of the following four books, some copies of which will be placed on course reserve at the library: Kathy Black’s *Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability*, Jennie Weiss Block’s *Copious Hosting: a Theology of Access for People with Disabilities*, Molly C. Haslam’s *Constructive Theology of Intellectual Disability: Human Being as Mutuality and Response*, or Jean Vanier’s *Becoming Human*. You may not choose a book to review outside this list.

   Please choose the book that you are most interested in reviewing. Which book helps you to engage the course-readings and discussions? The following criteria will guide evaluation:

   a. Has the student demonstrated a solid grasp of the author’s core argument?

   b. Does the student discuss the book’s important themes and/or parts?
c. Does the student critically and generously engage the author’s argument, and does the student use the course-materials to interact with that argument?

d. Does the student ask, and answer, critical questions concerning the author’s position?

Weight: 20% of final grade.

4. Accessibility Audit of Isaacson Chapel, with Paper

In March 2019, the class will be taking a “field trip” to Isaacson Chapel to assess some of its physical features, including: is the space level? Which areas are wide enough for wheelchair access? How wide are the doorways? What is the light quality? How are the acoustics, in light of people with low aural capacity? How would people with autism, intellectual disabilities, and mental-health needs integrate into this space?

After that ninety-minute long field trip, students will reflect on their discoveries, and—in conjunction with class discussions and readings—will produce a paper of 750 to 1500 words, describing their engagement with the following questions:

a. What about Isaacson makes you feel at home? That is, which features are accessible?

b. Which parts of the chapel would likely provide difficulties for people with multiple disabilities, including blindness/low visual acuity, D/deafness or low aural acuity, mobility issues (e.g., cerebral palsy, Parkinson’s), autism and other sensory processing disabilities, intellectual disabilities other than autism, and/or dementia?

c. Which parts are inaccessible to those people described above?

d. Therefore, what would you change about Isaacson if you could? Why?

Weight: 15% of final grade.

5. Integrative Paper

In 2250-2500 words, describe your revised theology of disability at length, using as your basis a part of the Christian tradition with which you substantially agree. Make your argument for your theology of disability based on:

a. The course readings, with substantive and clear reference to texts from the course (here you must show the professor that you understand the history of ideas related to your chosen/developed theology of disability);

b. The book you have chosen for review.

While no additional research outside these crucial sources is necessary, it is both permitted and most welcome. Please consult the professor should you wish to do additional research. This paper must contain a thesis, argument, and conclusion, must use proper reference-technique, and must append a bibliography. Weight: 30% of final grade.
6. Participation (10% of final grade):

The shared learning-experiences of this class depend on each learner’s fullest participation (that includes your professor!). That said, “participation” means not simply the frequency with which one talks in a classroom setting, but how one’s discourse adds to the classroom’s culture. This mark will be twofold. Let me explain…

Half of this mark (so, 5%) depends on your active participation in on-site class experiences; the other half (again, 5%) depends on an **800-word-minimum** reflective paper, due **every two weeks of class until March 21st, on Canvas, at class-time**. These reflective essays will obey the following “3-2-1” rubric:

- **3 things I learned from lecture/class time:**
  1. (150 words min.)
  2. (150 words min.)
  3. (150 words min.)

- **2 things you read from textbooks that connected to something discussed in class:**
  1. (150 words min.)
  2. (150 words min.)

- **1 new question I have:**

  As you interact with your classmates in real-time, and as you write your essays, please reflect: have you engaged the texts for the day deeply, hospitably, and critically? Are you trying to broaden your classmates’ horizons? Are you listening to, respecting, and engaging with the ideas of your colleagues, and helping your colleagues to examine their own areas of inquiry? Are you willing to ask for help when you don’t know how to engage with an idea or argument? Rightness is only one (small) facet of courteous conversation.

**Grading System for North Park Theological Seminary:**

A: Superior work (A = 95–100; A- = 93–94) This grade applies to exceptional work, the quality achieved through excellence of performance, not merely the fulfillment of the course requirements.
B: Above average (B+ = 91-92; B = 88-90; B- = 86-87) This grade applies to meritorious work, definitely above average, applied to more than the fulfillment of requirements.
C: Average (C+ = 84-85; C = 80-83; C – = 78-79) This grade applies to average work that still fulfills the course requirements.
D: Unsatisfactory (D+ = 76-77; D = 72-75; D – = 70-71) This grade, while indicating the student has completed a course, is to be understood as reflecting below average work. Course work receiving this grade will not be counted towards a degree.
F: Failure (69 and below)

**Late Work:** Graduate students at this University are expected to hand in assignments by the date given in the course outline. Again, this means a loss of a letter-grade per day late (A becomes A-, A- becomes B+, B+ become B…). This penalty is not applied to students with medical or compassionate difficulties; students facing such difficulties are kindly requested to consult with
their faculty advisor or academic dean, who should make a recommendation on the matter to the instructor. The absolute deadline for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course.

All papers are to be submitted electronically to the professor (mawalker@northpark.edu) on the day that they are due. Papers must be sent as a .doc or .docx file from a North Park email address (absolutely not as PDF or RTF files, and not from a personal email address). Papers should contain numbered pages, and be doubled-spaced.

**Please note this course’s late policy:** approval for an assignment extension must be obtained at least 48 hours before that assignment’s due-date; otherwise, papers will face a deduction of one-third of a letter-grade each day (that is, A becomes A-, B+ becomes B). Extensions are granted only in emergency situations; computer or device issues do NOT constitute an emergency.

**OTHER POLICIES**

**ACCOMMODATIONS FOR DISABILITIES**

North Park is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this class related to a disability, contact the Center for Student Engagement by email at ada@northpark.edu or phone at 773-244-5737 to schedule an appointment with the Learning Specialist. You can also stop by the Center for Student Engagement, located on the first floor of the Johnson Center.

**TITLE IX**

Students who believe they have been harassed, discriminated against, or involved in sexual violence should contact the Title IX Coordinator (773-244-6276 or TitleIX@northpark.edu) for information about reporting, campus resources and support services, including confidential counseling services.

As members of the North Park faculty, we are concerned about the well-being and development of our students and are available to discuss any concerns. Faculty are legally obligated to share information with the University’s Title IX coordinator in certain situations to help ensure that the student’s safety and welfare is being addressed, consistent with the requirements of the law. These disclosures include but are not limited to reports of sexual assault, relational/domestic violence, and stalking.

Please refer to North Park’s Safe Community site for reporting, contact information and further details, at [http://www.northpark.edu/Campus-Life-and-Services/Safe-Community](http://www.northpark.edu/Campus-Life-and-Services/Safe-Community).

**ACADEMIC HONESTY**

In accordance with our Christian heritage and commitment, North Park University is committed to the highest possible ethical and moral standards. Just as we will constantly strive to live up to these high standards, we expect our students to do the same. To that end, cheating of any sort will not be tolerated. Students who are discovered cheating will receive a failing grade on the assignment and are subject to discipline up to and including failure of a course and expulsion. Our definition of cheating includes but is not limited to:
1. Plagiarism – the use of another’s work as one’s own without giving credit to the individual. This includes using materials from the Internet.
2. Copying another’s answers on an examination.
3. Deliberately allowing another to copy one’s answers or work.
4. Signing an attendance roster for another who is not present.

For additional information, see the Seminary Academic Catalog, pp. 25–27.

Back-up copies. Please make back-up copies of assignments before handing them in.

Obligation to check email. At times, the course instructor may decide to send out important course information by email. To that end, all students are required to have a valid North Park email address. Students must have set up a North Park email address which is entered into Canvas and WebAdvisor. Information concerning information technology is available through the Centre for Online Education. Students should check their North Park email regularly for messages about the course. Forwarding your North Park email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from North Park addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from your course instructor may end up in your spam or junk mail folder.

Email communication with the course instructor. The professor aims to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. All email communications from students should be sent from a North Park email address. Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also the instructor cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. The professor is not obliged to respond to email from non-NPU addresses. The instructor will seek to respond to any email in a timely fashion during the work week (Monday through Friday). Emails sent on the weekend will be replied to during the next work-week.

Course Website(s)
- Canvas: https://northpark.instructure.com

This course uses Canvas, North Park’s learning-management system. To access it, go to the website above, and login using your North Park and password. Once you have logged in to the portal using your username and password, look for the My Courses module, where you’ll find the link to the website for all your Canvas-based courses. (Your course registration through WebAdvisor gives you access to the course website at Canvas.) Students who have trouble accessing Canvas should ask their professor for further help.

Weekly Schedule:

January 17th, 2019: Welcome to the Course! Reading syllabus; talking about hopes, dreams, and expectations for the class. What is ableism? How do we construct our theologies of disability? Whom do our theologies of disability benefit? Note: no readings on this day.

January 31st, 2019: the Place of People with Intellectual Disabilities. What does inclusion look like for people with intellectual disabilities in particular? How can the Church become more “heart” and less “head”? Please read for January 31st: Vanier, Becoming Human chs. 1-3, Reynolds ch. 2; Canvas: Yong, chapter 1, and Gutierrez.

February 7th, 2019: Part Two: L’Arche as exemplar. This session will examine Jean Vanier’s idealistic group of global communities integrating intellectual and physical disability. How do L’Arche communities contribute to our growing theologies of disability? Where do the sacraments fit into Vanier’s theology? Please read: Reynolds ch. 4; Vanier, Becoming Human chs. 4-7; Canvas: Calvin. Short Paper #2 DUE! 3-2-1 #2 DUE!

February 14th: Happy Valentine’s Day! Euthanasia. What are some ecclesial stances on assisted deaths, or “mercy killing”? How ought we to think about this issue in the Covenant? Please read: Canvas: Yong, chapter 3; Bonhoeffer.

February 21st: Contextualizing Jesus. What promise does Jesus hold for human beings who have varied abilities? A Christology of disability. Please read: Reynolds ch. 5; Canvas: Eiesland chapter 5; Nakashima Brock. 3-2-1 #3 DUE!

February 28th: the Place of the Sacraments. What do they do? What kind of communities are we trying to form around these rituals? Please (re)read: Canvas: Eiesland chs. 5 and 6; Smith; White.

March 7th: the Ecclesial Place of Lament. What does it mean for human beings to cry out to God, and their community, in pain? How can we the Church help that to happen? What part does the sacrament of Holy Communion play in the amelioration of lament? Please read: Canvas: Swinton, chapter 6; Yong, ch. 8. Reminder: book review due today! 3-2-1 #4 DUE today!

March 14th: Healing. What does it mean for human beings with different abilities to want healing? Should healing and normalization mean conformity? How do the sacraments aid us in our longing for healing? Please read: Canvas: Swinton, ch. 4.

March 21st: Abortion. What are churchly stances on this issue? How do we see it within the Covenant? If life is sacramental, how can we preserve it? Please read: Canvas: Bauerschmidt; Harrison and Cloyes; Singer. 3-2-1 #5 DUE today!


April 4th: Embodied Eschatology. What does it mean for us to be part of tikkun olam, or world-repair? How can a Church inclusive of disability promote glimpses of God’s Reign? Please read: Reynolds ch. 7; Canvas: Yong chapter 9, esp. pp. 270-95.

April 11th: Inclusive Design. What would a church sanctuary constructed with diverse bodies in mind look like? Field Trip to Isaacson Chapel. Please read: Canvas: Shapiro, ch. 7; Lathrop Holy Things ch. 5.
April 18th: Debrief of Inclusive Design Field Trip. What have we learned about our physical spaces? How can we apply it to our experiences in life and ministry within the Covenant? **Note: no readings.**

April 25th: Disability Pride: what is “disability pride”? How can we create an inclusive culture here at North Park? Please read: Canvas: Charlton. **Reminder: integrative papers DUE today!**

May 2nd: That's a Wrap. What have we learned in this class? How can we apply these lessons about the church as a community to our lives and congregations? **No readings. Accessibility Audit of Isaacson DUE on Canvas!**