



NORTH PARK
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THEO 5140: Advanced Seminar
Eschatology in a Secular Age
North Park Theological Seminary
Spring 2024, Thursdays 5:45-7:15pm
3 credit hours

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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Office hours by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will explore Christian theologies of eschatology, specifically as they have developed in the modern period in relation to patterns of secularization. This course will scrutinize the idea that eschatology has been “secularized” in contemporary life and consider ways that secularity itself is often premised upon an eschatological engagement with our world. To do this, the course will 1) analyze important developments in Christian eschatology from the premodern to the modern era, 2) investigate key eschatological concepts as they are used in traditional theological and secular contexts, and finally 3) construct theological responses to pressing contemporary concerns that can plausibly be considered eschatological in nature, including the climate crisis, the destruction of cultures through political violence, and the risk of human extinction.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through this course, students will:

1. Understand the important historical and intellectual shifts, especially related to secularization, that have influenced how theologians engage with the doctrine of eschatology.
2. Reflect on how the biblical witness continues to inform Christian hope and action within secular contexts.
3. Appreciate secular forms of thought not simply as antagonistic to Christian faith, but as important dialogue partners for deeper theological understanding.
4. Integrate contemporary accounts of the climate crisis, technological progress, political violence, and similar themes into their understanding of Christian faith and life.

COURSE STRUCTURE

As a hybrid class, this course is structured with both asynchronous and synchronous learning components:

1. Asynchronous learning (Friday through Wednesday): Preparation for each Thursday evening session includes completing assigned reading, watching course lectures (average 1 hour/week), and writing notes in response to weekly readings.

2. Synchronous learning (Thursday pm): Our 1.5-hour live sessions will be devoted to interactive engagement with the week's content and themes, building on your written notes.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity* (Baylor 2019)
2. Steven Charleston, *We Survived the End of the World: Lessons From Native America on Apocalypse and Hope* (Broadleaf 2023)
3. Additional pdf readings are available on Canvas

ASSESSMENTS AND GRADING SCALE

1. **Weekly Readings:** a few of the readings for this course are quite challenging, and many of them take quite different positions from one another on questions of eschatology. It will be important to read carefully and come to class discussion with questions. Each week, you will need to take notes on these readings and submit them in Canvas by noon of the class day that the readings are due. Take 20 minutes to write these notes, and use this space to raise questions about the readings, make connections with other readings, record new insights, and draw conclusions about the significance of the readings for eschatology. They will be graded for thoughtful completion. **(20%)**
2. **Participation in Class Discussions:** Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions of texts, bringing their interpretations, insights, and questions to the group. **(20%)**
3. **Seminar Facilitation:** each student will sign up for one class session when they will lead our discussion of the week's readings. To guide discussion, the student facilitator will prepare interpretive theses that analyze the main arguments of the week's reading(s). These should be uploaded to Canvas by 5pm on the day before the class session when they are discussed. Discussion facilitation will be modeled by the professor in early weeks of the class. **(20%)**
4. **Midterm Reflection Paper:** Students will write a 2000 word paper reflecting on the significance of one of the following three topics for eschatology: 1) the delay of the parousia, 2) modern understandings of history, 3) secularization. This is a reflection paper; it should engage with at least one, and ideally more than one, of the readings from Weeks 1-8, but no further research is necessary. Due March 18. **(10%)**
5. **Final Paper:** students will write a final paper of about 3000 words that makes a constructive theological claim in relation to one of the topics discussed during class. The paper will be cognizant of biblical and theological tradition and responsive to modern issues and forms of thought. A draft thesis statement for this paper will be submitted on 11:59 PM March 25 and count toward 5% of the course grade. An annotated bibliography of three sources will be submitted on 11:59 PM April 1 and count toward 5% of the course grade. The final paper will be submitted on 11:59 PM May 9 and count toward 20% of the course grade. **(30% total)**

GRADING

Weekly Readings/Notes 20%
Participation 20%
Seminar Facilitation 20%
Midterm Reflection Paper 10%
Final Paper 30%

Letter grades will be assigned according to scale printed in the Seminary Academic Catalog, p. 20:

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 toward a degree.

F: Failure (69 and below) To receive credit in the subject, the course must be repeated.

ADDITIONAL COURSE GUIDELINES

Attendance & participation. Only two absences are permitted without penalty to your final grade. More than two absences will result in a lowered grade; more than three absences will result in failure. Two late arrivals will be considered an absence.

Assessment submission. Submit all work through Canvas as Word files, including your last name in the document title. Assignment description lists the dates and times they are due. You can read all of these times according to your time zone. Unless you have made an arrangement 24 hours prior to the due date, work submitted late will receive a 1/3 grade reduction each day (e.g., an A would receive A- after one day, etc.) and may receive less detailed feedback. Work will not be accepted over two weeks late.

Communication. I encourage you to email me with any questions and concerns, and I will make every effort to respond within 24 hours M–F. Before emailing a question, be sure the answer isn't contained in the course syllabus or assessment guidelines posted in Canvas.

Inclusive language. In accordance with the Seminary Writing Handbook, please use gender inclusive language when referring to people in general. The Handbook suggests using “he” and “she” interchangeably, but this can be cumbersome. Use of the singular gender inclusive “they” may be preferable. In theological writing, “humanity” is also often a relevant term to keep in mind when referring to people universally. Finally, I encourage you to consider how to refer to God in your work. Christian theology and liturgical practice has usually used masculine terms for God, but on the other hand has also affirmed that God is incorporeal (and so neither male nor female). While there is no requirement to refer to God using gender inclusive language in this course, using “Godself” or simply “God” instead of gendered pronouns is a common practice in theology.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

In keeping 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.
 5. Use of ChatGPT or other AI composition software to impersonate individual assignments.
- For additional information, see the [Seminary Academic Catalog](#), pp. 25–26.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Your experience in this class is important to me. North Park is committed to creating inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have already established your accommodations, please share your accommodation letter with me so we can discuss how your accommodations will be implemented in this course. If you have not yet established services and have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations, please email the Disability Access Specialist or contact by phone (773-244-5737). Student Engagement facilitates the interactive process that establishes reasonable accommodations.

TITLE IX

Students who believe they may have experienced sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking should contact the Title IX Coordinator (773) 244-5664 or TitleIX@northpark.edu to learn more about reporting options, resources, and support 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 members are private resources meaning we are legally obligated to share information about the behavior reported above with the University's Title IX coordinator. If you are unsure whether you want your concerns disclosed to the Title IX Coordinator, we encourage you to contact Counseling Support Services at (773) 244-4897 or counseling@northpark.edu.

Please refer to North Park's [Safe Community](#) site for reporting, contact information, and further details.

INCOMPLETE GRADES

If, due to extenuating circumstances (specifically, pregnancy, illness, personal and family issues, military assignment, etc.), a student anticipates they will be unable to complete course work within the allotted time, that student may request a grade of incomplete from the course instructor before the last week of class clearly stating the reason(s) for this request. Overscheduling and/or lack of self-discipline are not considered extenuating circumstances. If the request is timely and meets the criteria, student and instructor will submit the incomplete grade form and the grade for that class will be listed as "I" until the last day of the following semester. If coursework is not submitted by the last day of the following semester the listing of "I" will automatically be changed to "F." For the full policy, see page 15 of the [Seminary Academic Catalog](#).

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 18 – What is Eschatology?

Gerhard Sauter, "The Concept and Task of Eschatology" *SJT* 41.4 (1988): 499-515.

Vitor Westhelle, "Conquering Eschatology" and "Eschatological Taxonomies" in *Eschatology and Space* (Springer 2012) pp. 37-69. **No reading notes due.**

January 25 – Midwinter Conference, class does not meet.

Read Bultmann *History and Eschatology*, pp. 1-22. **No reading notes due.**

February 1 – History of Eschatology: Premodern

St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letter 199* in *The Works of St. Augustine II.3* (New City Press 2004), pp. 327-354.

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica Supplement Q. 74: The Fire of the Final Conflagration* (~20 pp)

February 8 – History of Eschatology: Modern

Judith Wolfe, “Eschatology” in *Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth Century Christian Thought* (20 pp.)

Judith Wolfe, “The Eschatological Turn in German Philosophy” *Modern Theology* 35.1 (2019): 55-70.

February 15 – History and Eschatology I.

Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, pp. 23-90

February 22 – The Delay of the Parousia

John-Christian Eurell, “The Delay of the Parousia and the Changed Function of Eschatological Language”
Journal of Early Christian History 10.1 (2020): 61-80.

Ernst Käsemann, “The Beginnings of Christian Theology” in *New Testament Questions of Today*, pp. 82-107.

February 29 – History and Eschatology II.

Bultmann *History and Eschatology* pp. 91-156

March 7 – Secularization

Hans Blumenberg, “Secularization: Critique of a Category of Historical Illegitimacy” (30 pp.)

Ernst Troeltsch, “Eschatology” in *Religion in History* (Fortress, 1991) pp. 146-159.

March 14 – Spring Break, no classes

Take this week to review course readings and finish the Midterm reflective paper.

DUE March 18 11:59 PM: Midterm Reflection Paper

March 21 – Eternity

St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions XI*

Martin Hägglund, “Love” in *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom*, pp. 69-124

DUE March 25 11:59 PM: Thesis Statement for Final Paper

March 28 – Hope

Vincent Lloyd, “For What Are Blacks to Hope?” and “For what are Whites to Hope?” in *Religion of the Field Negro: On Black Secularism and Black Theology* pp. 131-160.

Willa Swenson-Lengyel, “Beyond Eschatology: Environmental Pessimism and the Future of Human Hoping” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 45:3 (2017):413-436.

DUE April 1 11:59 PM: Annotated Bibliography for Final Paper

April 4 – The World-End

Kathryn Tanner, “Eschatology Without a Future?” in *The End of the World and the Ends of God* pp. 222-237.

Kathryn Tanner, “The End” in *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity* (97-124)



Thomas Moynihan, "Introduction" and "A Very Rational End of the World" in *X-Risk: How Humanity Discovered Its Own Extinction* (MIT Press 2020), pp. 7-43.

April 11 – Climate Crisis

Robin Globus Veldman, "Narrating the Environmental Apocalypse" *Ethics & Environment* 17(1) 2012: 1-23.

David Wallace-Wells, "The Uninhabitable Earth" *New York Magazine* (2017)

Barbara R. Rossing, "Reimagining Eschatology: Toward Healing and Hope for a World at the Eschatos" in Grace Ji-Sun Kim & Hilda Koster (eds.), *Planetary solidarity: Global Women's Voices on Christian doctrine and Climate Justice*, pp. 325–347 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017)

April 18 – American Apocalypse I

Charleston, *We Survived the End of the World*, ch. 1-4

April 25 – American Apocalypse II

Charleston, *We Survived the End of the World*, ch. 5-7 and Epilogue

May 2 – Final Discussion

This class session will be devoted to a synthesis discussion. We will take the time to reflect on what we've learned, and each student will be able to share the thesis that they are defending in their final paper.

DUE May 9 11:59 PM: Final Paper