

Foundations of Christian Worship
THEO 5120-01 & -03, Fall 2024
North Park Theological Seminary – Stateville Correctional Center
(3 credit hours, *syllabus subject to minor changes)

Instructor: David Bjorlin, PhD

Class Description:

An Introduction to Christian Worship examines the history, theology, and practices of Christian worship from an ecumenical perspective. The main goals of the class are to: (1) introduce the discipline of liturgical studies; (2) develop foundations and skills for ritual leadership; and (3) foster theological/pastoral reflection and evaluation of the liturgical life of faith communities.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a theology and practice of Christian worship that is historically, liturgically, and culturally coherent;
2. observe and constructively critique one's own tradition of Christian worship on the basis of the historical, theological, cultural, and practical norms of Christian worship;
3. articulate key issues (historical, theological, ecumenical) pertaining to the sacrament of baptism and the eucharist;
4. illustrate the connection between the worshiping life of the church and its theological beliefs and ethical actions;
5. describe the basic movements of a rite of passage;
6. design a rite of passage that takes into account historical, theological, social/pastoral, and cultural factors;
7. analyze the main components of liturgical inculturation and engage the diversity of Christian worship.

Accommodations

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 SRA program director.

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 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. Using one’s own work from previous assignments or other class assignments without permission.
5. Signing an attendance roster for another who is not present.

In the special instance of group work, the instructor will make clear his/her expectations with respect to individual vs. collaborative work. A violation of these expectations may be considered cheating as well.

For further information on this subject you may refer to the Academic Dishonesty section of the University’s online catalog, pp. 25-27.

Incomplete Policy

If, due to extenuating circumstances (specifically, illness, personal and family issues) a student anticipates he will be unable to complete course work within the allotted time, that student must submit the request form for a grade of incomplete to the course instructor before the last week of class clearly stating the reason(s) for this request. If the request is timely and meets the criteria, 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.”

Required Texts

1. Duck, Ruth. *Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century*, 2nd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2021.
2. Driver, Tom F. *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.
3. Cone, James. *The Spirituals and the Blues*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991.
4. Jewish Ritual and Values Reader (provided by instructor)
5. Other articles as assigned and provided by instructor.

Optional Texts

1. Pedrito Maynard-Reid, *Diverse Worship: African-American, Caribbean, and Hispanic Perspectives*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.

Assessments

Grading

The grading scale for the course will be as follows:

A	100-93%
A-	92.9-90%
B+	89.9-87
B	86.9-83
B-	82.9-80%
C+	79.9-77%
C	76.9-73%
C-	72.9-70%
D+	69.9-67%
D	66.9-63%
D-	62.9-60%

Late Policy

With exceptions for sickness and emergencies, assignments turned in late will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., a B will drop to a B-) for each day over the deadline. After a week, the highest score you can receive on an assignment is 50%.

Assessments:

Attendance and Participation (10%)

Regular attendance and participation in class discussion is expected. Any absences over two will reduce your participation grade. Note: part of your participation grade will include completing all required readings. You will be asked to sign a reading log at the end of the class detailing the approximate percentage of reading done. Assignments turned in late will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., a B will drop to a B-) for each day over the deadline.

Essay: Christian Worship as Ritual (15%)

Write a two-part essay (1000-1250 words total):

1. Part I (500-750 words) – Describe the worship tradition(s) you have been a part of in your life. What was the congregation's demographic (race, age, class, etc.)? What did a typical worship service look like from beginning to end? What were some of the typical characteristics of worship? If you have not been a part of a worship tradition, what other rituals or ritual actions were a part of your life?
2. Write an essay (500 words) that give your initial definition of Christian worship based on the introductory readings and personal experience and how Christian worship can be understood as a ritual.

Book Review: Liberation and Ritual in Cone's *Spirituals and the Blues* (20%)

Write an essay (800-1000 words) first presenting the main arguments of James Cone's *Spirituals and the Blues* (in about 200-250 words) and then, based on previous class readings and discussion, elaborating on how the spirituals played a liberating role in the African American tradition and the ways they might still be used as part of liberative rites of passage.

You should use at least two other sources (class lectures count as one) in your essay.

Ritual Observation and Analysis (25%)

Analyze the Jewish coming of age through secondary sources and the Bat Mitzvah service we watch during class. In light of your observation and readings, describe how the ritual works in the Jewish community, how it moves the participants through the steps of the rite of passage with specific examples from the rite, and what lessons you might glean for coming of age rites in your own cultural context.

There are three parts to this assignment:

1. Research secondary sources provided by the instructor on the Bat Mitzvah and Jewish religious and cultural values;
2. During class, you will observe a Bat Mitzvah service.
3. Write a paper (maximum 1500 words) that describes:
 - a. how the Bat Mitzvah provides order, community, and transformation to the Jewish community, focusing specifically on what beliefs and values are especially promoted through the rite;
 - b. how the ritual moves the participant through the three stages of the rite of passage (separation, transition, (re)incorporation);
 - c. how the rite could be liberative to the individual and the community, and;
 - d. if you were to develop a coming of age rite of passage for your own cultural context, what ideas does this rite give you? What might need to be added in your own context?

New Annotated Rite of Passage (20%)

Students, in teams of three, will create a rite of passage for a life-cycle event or other important transition in the community. The event/rite of passage will be chosen by your group in consultation with your professor. This could include: important milestones (e.g., significant birthdays or anniversaries), beginning of educational programs, graduations, births or deaths of family members outside, etc. The rite of passage should include:

1. An introductory paragraph explaining the rite and the context in which it would be celebrated.
2. Two original prayers
3. At least one central scriptural passage
4. At least two songs (or other musical/artistic expression)

5. Objects/symbols (e.g., use of a ring in a marriage ceremony or candles at funeral)
6. embodied action/physical movement (e.g., processing; dancing; kneeling; etc.)

The service should also have rubrics (i.e., instructions) so that anyone who was given your rite could be able to perform it based on the instructions your group gives for both leaders and participants.

In addition, each element of the service should be annotated, telling the instructor why the particular element was chosen and how it relates to the rest of the elements and overall purpose of the rite.

Individual Analysis of Rite of Passage (10%)

Each member of the group will submit an **individual** 1000-word analysis of the ritual. You will describe the ritual, explain why this rite is needed and what pastoral purpose it serves, demonstrate how the rite moves the participant(s) from separation through the transition/liminal phase to reincorporation, and define your individual contribution to the group assignment.