



**THEO 7190 Grace and Humanness:
Theological Reflections Because of Culture**

North Park Theological Seminary

Summer 2024: May 20-July 12; Intensive Dates: June 10-14, 8:30 AM – 5:00 PM

3 credit hours

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

There is no theology outside of context. One of the major contributions from Latina/o theologians is a reconfigured relationship to popular culture or the cultural production of the masses. Chicano theologians have drawn significant theological insights from the story of Juan Diego y La Virgen de Gualalupe, and U.S. Latina/o theologians use “mestizaje” as a metaphor for identity formation. These theologians draw from culture as a source for theological reflection and identity formation. In this course, students will reflect on the ways culture and theology are mutually constituted, asking questions of identity, interculturality, and the formation of “peoplehood” in the church. Students will visit church and cultural sites, reflecting on how these contribute to a process of re-humanization. (Fulfills a general and cultural diversity elective for all degree programs)

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the completion of this course students will be able to:

- Articulate a methodology that draws on cultural formations as a source for theological reflection
- Relate theologies of creation, sin, grace, pneumatology, and peoplehood to processes of identity formation
- Write a theological personal narrative that demonstrates how the Spirit reconstitutes identity and peoplehood

REQUIRED TEXTS

Bible (NRSV Recommended)

Bantum, Brian. *The Death Of Race: Building A New Christianity In A Racial World*. Fortress Press, 2016.

Cone, James H. *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian*. Orbis Books, 2018. (Selected Readings)

Soelle, Dorothy. *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015. (Selected Readings)

Additional Articles/Selections from other readings listed below are available on course site

Costas, Orlando. *Conversion as a Complex Experience* (pdf)

Padilla, Emanuel. *Theologies that Resemble our People* (pdf)

Evans Jr., James. *We have all Been* Intro & chp 1 (pdf)

Rivera, Mayra. *God and Difference* (pdf)



Must select one of the following:

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. Reprint edition. Boston ; New York: Mariner Books, 2019.

Gonzalez, Xochitl. *Olga Dies Dreaming*. Flatiron Books: New York, 2021.*

Thomas, Piri. *Down These Mean Streets*. New York: Vintage, 1997.*

*These two novels include incidents of sexual abuse/violence. While all three novels include sex, students are warned to consider Lahiri's book or to skip passages in the selected texts.

**Students may request an alternative novel, but this must be discussed with the professor via zoom at least two weeks prior to our in-person gathering

ASSESSMENTS AND GRADING SCALE

PRE-WORK

“My” People’s Playlist (5%): Using Spotify, Youtube, or Apple Music, create a playlist of 5-7 songs that represent “your people.” Share the link to the playlist in the provided discussion board with a brief description (120 words max) of how the songs represent your people and your connection to the selected music. Throughout the course, listen to your playlist and to those of your classmates. You will return to the playlist during your postwork. Note: This is a pass/fail assignment; Students get credit for completion. **Due May 27th.**

Cultural Formation in the Novel Paper (20%): Write a 2-3 page (750-800 words) *theological reflection* on your selected novel. The paper will answer the following prompts: How did faith and spirituality shape the protagonist’s understanding of God and themselves within their community? How did this book effect your understanding of God and yourself within your community? Where do you recognize yourself in the story? Where does the story feel foreign/other? See grading rubric in Appendix I. **Due June 3rd.**

Cultural “Me” Map (5%): Using a sheet of paper draw a “mindmap” with yourself at the center. **Due in person, June 10th.**

1. Step One: Draw a Circle Around your name
2. Step Two: Using lines, connect yourself to at least 3-4 major descriptors of your cultural identity, which will also be encircled. You choose which descriptors are important/major.
3. Step Three: Add layers of specific detail beyond the initial descriptors as needed. For instance, if you add “Latino” as a descriptor, you can draw a line to a new circle that specifies your nationality (e.g., Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican).

See example uploaded on course site. Note: This is a pass/fail assignment; Students get credit for completion.



IN-PERSON WEEK WORK

Daily Openings (20%): Each day of our intensive gathering you will be responsible for identifying at least *two* quotes from the reading that open our discussion and speak to the central question of the day. These passages might be particularly difficult, enlightening, or cause a strong emotional response. Bring these quotes (include book & pg numbers) along with a brief description of why you chose each passage (~100 words). You should also prepare at least one question from the readings. Reflections are to be completed prior to class each day; Our class discussions will be centered primarily on the questions/issues you raise. All reflections are worth 20 total points. These will be collected for review at the end of the intensive gathering: **June 14th**.

Note: Students are *encouraged* to read *in advance* and prepare their daily openings before our in-person gathering.

Testimony Timeline (5%): Using a sheet of paper, draw a timeline of your Christian and cultural formation. Highlight moments where the two formations are linked by experiences. Provide concise commentary on the events details. You will later choose one of these events to present to the class. Note: This is a pass/fail assignment; Students get credit for completion. **Due in person June 12th**.

Theological Testimony Presentation (10%): Students will present a theological reflection on their cultural formation, choosing an episode of their life to analyze and present. Presentations will be **done June 14th**. After these presentations, students will be given opportunity during postwork to adjust their testimony papers/projects to improve their narration based on feedback received in class.

Alternative Completion: On presentation day, you may alternatively choose to present your visual and/or poetic project as your testimonial. Your artful response must be accompanied by a one to two page exposition that clearly identifies a specific anchoring experience as well as offer some clear indication of your theological analysis. In other words, your write up should include enough explanatory text to convey your analysis and personal reflection. You must discuss your plan for this alternative submission with instructor at least a week prior to due date.

See grading rubric for both paper and alternative final in Appendix III.

POST-WORK

Popular Culture and Theology Reflection (10%): In view of our class discussions, readings, and our site visit to St. Benedict the African, write an 850-1,000 words paper theologically analyzing a selected piece from the Ann and Arthur Eiland Art Gallery or another work found at St. Benedict the African. Your paper should describe the form/style of the art, its significance, and draw theological insights from the piece. In particular, your paper should explain the generative potential of the art piece for a congregations cultural formation as a people. You should answer the question, "How does this piece inform the theological anthropology of the church?" In other words, "what does this art piece say about what it means to be human and belong to one another?"

You should write in a way that thoughtfully integrates your major insights from at least two readings from the course.

The paper must follow standard Turbaian-format, including bibliography. Citations from sources should make a substantial contribution to the paper and should not be included simply for the sake of a footnote. See grading rubric in Appendix IV. **Due June 23rd.**

Theological Testimony Paper (20%): Students will submit a theological reflection on their cultural formation, drawing from significant episodes in their life to analyze and present. Detailed instructions for this paper can be found in Appendix II. To complete this assignment, students must read Cone’s *Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody*, as it serves as the primary example for the assignment.

See grading rubric for the paper in Appendix III. **Due July 7th.**

“My” People’s Playlist Review (5%): Write a brief (200 word max) response to your original discussion post, reflecting on how the playlists listened to during the class shaped and informed your theological reflections. What lyrics stuck with you? What histories did the songs keep recalling? What themes did the music introduce? Note: This is a pass/fail assignment; Students get credit for completion. **Due July 10th.**

Assessment		Points	% of Grade
A1	Cultural Formation in the Novel Paper		20%
A2	Daily Openings		20%
A2	Theological Testimony Assignment		40%
	Cultural “Me” Map	5	
	Testimony Timeline	5	
	Theological Testimony Presentation	10	
	Theological Testimony Paper/Artwork	20	
A4	Popular Culture and Theology Reflection		20%
	“My” People’s Playlist Pre-work	5	
	“My” People’s Playlist Post-work	5	
	Artwork Reflection	10	
Total:			100%

Grading scale shall be as follows (per Seminary Academic Catalog)

Letter Grade	Percentage Equivalent	Letter Grade	Percentage Equivalent
A	100 - 93	C	76.9 - 73
A-	92.9 - 90	C-	72.9 - 68
B+	89.9 - 87	D+	67.9 - 65
B	86.9 - 83	D	64.9 - 63
B-	82.9 - 80	D-	62 - 60
C+	79.9 - 77	F	<60



ADDITIONAL COURSE GUIDELINES

Attendance Policy:

Because this is a summer intensive, students are expected to be prompt and regular in attendance at all scheduled classes. Arrangements for short-term absences throughout a class day due to illness or emergency must be made with the instructor **in advance or as quickly as possible**. In circumstances requiring longer-term absences or special circumstances, the student should notify Seminary Academic and Student Services.

Class Participation:

Students are expected to actively participate in class by engaging in class discussions/activities and coming prepared to engage the week's reading. Student participation will be measured via *Daily Openings* assignment, which will be submitted for review at the end of our intensive gathering: **June 14th**.

In addition, while class PowerPoint slides and/or other in-class material will be made available for the student to use for study purposes, students should also plan to take notes in class by hand to help them process the class lectures/discussions. Due to the temptation to text, surf the internet, check Facebook or email, etc., LAPTOPS, CELL PHONES and all WEB-ENABLED DEVICES are not allowed in class.

Extra Credit Opportunities:

Students will often ask about extra credit opportunities. This course will not have extra credit opportunities. If, however, a student misses an assignment or wishes to improve an assignment, students should discuss this with the instructor ASAP. Do not wait until the end of the semester to ask to recover points lost.

Assignment Policies:

1. All papers submitted must use Turabian. All papers must be typed in Times New Roman 12-pt. font and double spaced. Students must not exceed 1-inch margins and must not add unnecessary spacing between sentences, paragraphs or paper sections. Papers that do not abide by these standards will be reduced by a full-letter grade.
2. Any ideas that you summarize or paraphrase that are unique to any author needs to be cited as a footnote. Your papers should not have extensive quoting including biblical verses (you can simply give the reference in parenthesis or a footnote), although brief quotes are acceptable.
3. Assignments can be submitted no more than one class periods late but will receive a 10-point grade reduction. After two class periods, the assignment will not be accepted.
4. All written assignments should use gender inclusive language when referring to people (e.g. *humanity* not *man*). See [Student Writing Handbook](#) for more detail on how North Park defines inclusive language (pg. 20).

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.
5. Signing an attendance roster for another who is not present.
6. 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

PRE WORK –

1. Playlist added to discussion board. **Due May 27th, 11:59 pm.**
2. Novel should be read in advance of in-person gathering. Cultural Formation in the Novel Paper due **June 3rd, 11:59 pm.**
3. Cultural “Me” Map to be completed prior to gathering. **Due in person, June 10th.**

IN PERSON WEEK

Day 1 June 10: Creation, the Cultural Mandate, and Divine Image

Reading: Syllabus; Bantum, *Death of Race*, Intro, ch. 1-2; Evans Jr., James. *We have all Been* Intro & chp 1 (pdf);

DUE: Daily Openings begin. Cultural “Me” Map.

Day 2 June 11: The Fall, Sin, and the Tower of Babel

Reading: Bantum, *Death of Race*, ch. 3; Soelle, *The Understanding of Sin*

Day 3 June 12: Cite Visit at St. Benedict the African

Reading: *Theologies that Resemble our People* pdf; Soelle, *Introducing Black Theology*

DUE: Testimony Timeline

Note: Students will have a student fee \$25.00 used to cover a breakfast meal prior to cite visit. We depart together from North Park at 10 am and return at ~3:00 pm.

Day 4 June 13: Grace, Salvation, and Disalienation

Reading: Bantum, *Death of Race*, ch. 4-6; Costas, *Conversion as a Complex Experience* (pdf); Soelle, *The Understanding of Grace & Cross and Resurrection*

Day 5 June 14: The Spirit, God’s People, and a Bridge through the Arts

Reading: Bantum, *Death of Race*, ch. 7; Soelle, *The Kingdom of God and the Church*; Rivera *God and Difference* (pdf)

DUE: Daily Openings and Theological Testimony Presentation

POST WORK –

1. Popular Culture and Theology Reflection due **June 23rd at 11:59 pm.**
2. Theological Testimony Paper due **July 7th at 11:59**
 - a. Note: Completion of this assignment assumes reading completion of Cone’s *Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody*. This is the only reading required of your post work, as Cone’s autobiography serves as an example of what your paper can become.
3. “My” People’s Playlist Response due **July 10th at 11:59 pm.**



APPENDIX I - Cultural Formation in the Novel Paper Rubric

	Observations	Critical Thinking	Writing Skills
Level 4 A	The student makes important observations which are relevant to the four questions provided in the instructions. The student observations demonstrate an understanding of theology as an autobiographical and biographical work, and they draw clear theological insight from Nayeri's testimony.	The student moves beyond merely summarizing the context and content of the book and identifies the meaning and significance of the story for theology. The student's description of the meaning for the community of God is accurate to the book and demonstrates a high level of critical reflection.	The student demonstrates graduate level writing skills with clear sentence structure, good grammar, proper citation of sources and minimal spelling or grammatical errors (1 to 3). The student's communication is clear and understandable.
Level 3 B	The student makes some important observations of the context and the content of Nayeri's work which are relevant to theology. Most of the observations are significant and necessary, but others are not essential.	The student identifies the meaning and significance of the story based on observations made, but the student's description of the meaning for the community of God is limited, demonstrated by gaps in the student's understanding of the book's significance for the Church today.	The student's writing style demonstrates college level writing skills with clear sentence structure, good grammar and proper citation of sources but there are more than three spelling errors and at times it is unclear what the student is presenting.
Level 2 C	The student makes observations about Nayeri's testimony. While some observations clarify some theological insight, many are insignificant.	The student's description of the significance of the story is misguided and/or not based on observations made about its content and context. The student's interpretation does not demonstrate an understanding of the story's significance for the church today.	The student's sentence structure is awkward with grammatical errors noted on three or more pages, sources are cited but improperly and there are more than three spelling errors.
Level 1 D	The student makes few observations, but most are not relevant to theology and identifying meaning in Nayeri's testimony.	The student merely summarizes what the story says and does not demonstrate an understanding of what the story means theologically.	The student's writing style is not acceptable for graduate level work.

APPENDIX II – Theological Testimony Paper Further Instructions

“Theology is essentially the church’s response to the *autobiographical impulse*, and it grows out of the need to proclaim with authority and commitment the identity and mission of the church in the world. That is, in theology, the church both asks and answers the questions, ‘*Who are we,*’ and ‘*where are we going?*’” -James H Evans Jr., *We Have Been Believers*, 1

“[theology should] promote [in God’s people] an *authentic* and *essential* knowledge of themselves.” -James H Evans Jr., *We Have Been Believers*, 27

“One discovers or has revealed to one the [identity of God] ... not solely in the Bible, nor only through culture, but in the **telling of one’s own faith stories** (affirming their legitimacy) and relating them to the stories of others in terms of the freedom struggle...” *We Have Been Believers*, 36

In this testimony presentation, you will say something theological by *telling your faith story* as Evans Jr describes in the selected quotes above. Students should follow the methodology described by Evans Jr. in chapter one of *We Have Been Believers* (pg. 28-36). Students will be graded on their ability to present theology in narrative form. Specifically, this means student stories should:

1. Develop from a single, specific, and personal experience (see pg. 29)
2. Connect their personal story to religious tradition (see pg. 29)
3. Suggest political/moral teachings (see pg. 30)
4. Critique “powers and principalities” shaping their story (see pg. 30)
5. Invite the reader toward a specific repentance decision (see pgs. 30-31)

The guidelines below are intended to help you develop the varying sections of your paper.

- Papers should be 1,200-1,500 words in length
- If you include dialogue (i.e., a conversation between two or more characters), add a line break every time a new person speaks. Note: Dialogue should be brief and directly tied to the theme of your story
- Your personal story should focus on one theological theme. Examples of stories that focus on a single theological theme will be provided in the assigned reading.



APPENDIX III

“... theological narrative is a retelling of [our stories] with an emphasis on **intellectual clarity** and **existential commitment**.” – *We Have Been Believers*, 29

	Existential Commitment	Intellectual Clarity	Writing Skills
Level 4 A	The student tells a compelling (i.e., moving) story which develops the five aspects of narrative theological form provided in the instructions. The student story demonstrates an understanding of theology as an autobiographical and biographical work, and they draw clear theological insight from their testimony.	The student moves beyond merely summarizing the experiences in their testimony and identifies prophetic theological teaching. The student’s description of the meaning of their story for the community of God is clear and demonstrates a high level of critical reflection.	The student demonstrates graduate level writing skills with clear sentence structure, good grammar, proper citation of sources and minimal spelling or grammatical errors (1 to 3). The student’s communication is clear and understandable.
Level 3 B	The student makes some important observations of their story which are relevant to theology, but the student does not develop 1-2 of the five aspects of narrative theological form. Most of the observations are significant and necessary, but others are not essential.	The student identifies the meaning and significance of their story, but the student’s description of the meaning for the community of God is limited, demonstrated by vagueness in the student’s practical and ethical claims.	The student’s writing style demonstrates college level writing skills with clear sentence structure, good grammar and proper citation of sources but there are more than three spelling errors and at times it is unclear what the student is presenting.
Level 2 C	The student makes observations about their testimony. While some observations clarify some theological insight, many are insignificant or underdeveloped, leaving the reader without a clear sense of a central theme.	The student’s description of the significance of the story is misguided and/or not based on biblically rooted theological reflection. The student’s interpretation does not demonstrate an understanding of their story’s significance for the church today.	The student’s sentence structure is awkward with grammatical errors noted on three or more pages, sources are cited but improperly and there are more than three spelling errors.
Level 1 D	The student makes few observations, but most are not relevant to theology and identifying meaning in their testimony.	The student merely summarizes their testimony and does not demonstrate an understanding of what the story means theologically.	The student’s writing style is not acceptable for graduate level work.



APPENDIX III (Continued) – Final Paper Alternative Completion Rubric

	Existential Commitment	Intellectual Clarity	Artistic Skill
Level 4 A	The student tells a compelling (i.e., moving) story through an artful medium which develops the five aspects of narrative theological form provided in the instructions. The student story demonstrates an understanding of theology as an autobiographical and biographical work, and they draw clear theological insight from their testimony.	The student moves beyond merely summarizing the experiences in their artwork and identifies prophetic theological teaching. The student’s description of the meaning of their story for the community of God is clear and demonstrates a high level of critical reflection.	The student demonstrates artistic excellence with clear thematic and artistic structure, good grammar (in their exposition), and minimal errors (1 to 3). The student’s communication is clear and understandable.
Level 3 B	The student’s artwork makes some important observations of their story which are relevant to theology, but the student does not develop 1-2 of the five aspects of narrative theological form. Most of the observations are significant and necessary, but others are not essential.	The student identifies the meaning and significance of their story, but the student’s description of the meaning for the community of God is limited, demonstrated by vagueness in the student’s practical and ethical claims.	The student’s artistic style and form demonstrates high level skills with structure, good grammar and proper citation of sources but there are more than three errors and at times it is unclear what the student is presenting.
Level 2 C	The student artwork makes observations about their testimony. While some observations clarify some theological insight, many are insignificant or underdeveloped, leaving the audience without a clear sense of a central theme.	The student’s description of the significance of the story is misguided and/or not based on biblically rooted theological reflection. The student’s interpretation does not demonstrate an understanding of their story’s significance for the church today.	The student’s artistic structure is awkward and/or underdeveloped, and their accompanying exposition does not clarify their theological theme.
Level 1 D	The student makes few observations, but most are not relevant to theology and identifying meaning in their testimony.	The student merely summarizes their testimony and does not demonstrate an understanding of what the story means theologically.	The student’s style is not acceptable for graduate level work.