



**Course Title Theo 5140: Black Faith Matters**

North Park Theological Seminary  
Illinois River Correctional Center]  
Spring 2025, 3 credit hours  
Intensive Course Dates: April 7-11

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:**

Rev. Dominique Gilliard, Adjunct Professor, Director of Racial Righteousness and Reconciliation for the Evangelical Covenant Church

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course explores spaces of production of Black theology in the U.S. and ways it provides important models of faithful theological engagement. The course uses theology in dialogue with other disciplines to survey the development of Black Christianity, assess key social forces that reinforce oppression of African Americans, and examine the role of the black church in the U.S. Students will analyze sources in theology, history, social ethics, and ministry. The course examines include ongoing effects of slavery manifest in incarceration and abuse. The contributions the course celebrates through the lens of Black theology include community development, character formation, preaching, music and social engagement.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

1. Analyze themes critical to the social context, theology, and history of Black religious experience.
2. Respond to contributions of Black Christians in the life of the church, including perspectives and experiences of Biblical narratives, themes, and mandates emphasizing breaking cycles of poverty and injustice.
3. Reflect on pastoral or ministerial identity that is inclusive of knowledge of and deepened sensitivity to the issues and exigencies of Black faith within American Christianity.
4. Demonstrate capacity to communicate in contextually appropriate and effective ways.
5. Engage diversity and show growth toward intercultural competence by considering various ethnic and cultural perspectives represented in the class.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

1. Angela N. Parker, *If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I?: Black Lives Matter and Biblical Authority* (Eerdmans), 2021.
2. Cole Arthur Riley, *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories that Make Us* (Convergent Books), 2023.
3. Dominique Gilliard, *Subversive Witness: Scripture's Call to Leverage Privilege* (Zondervan Press), 2021.
4. Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove: IVP Books), 2020.

5. James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis Books), 2013.
6. Willie James Jennings, *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: WJKP), 2017.

## ASSESSMENTS AND GRADING SCALE

### 1. Reflection Papers (25%)

Students will be asked to reflect upon each assigned book, and an article of your choice. Each reflection should be 2 full (but no more than 3) pages in length.

Each reflection paper should answer three questions:

- 1) What is something new (or what are new things) that I learned from this assignment?
- 2) How will my learning impact my formation?
- 3) How will I embody or vocationally apply my learning?

Reflection papers must be emailed to the professor by midnight on the following dates.

Due dates:

Reflection 1: *January 21<sup>st</sup> (Reading While Black)*

Reflection 2: *February 4<sup>th</sup> (Subversive Witness)*

Reflection 3: *February 18<sup>th</sup> (The Cross and the Lynching Tree)*

Reflection 4: *March 4<sup>th</sup> (This Here Flesh)*

Reflection 5: *March 18<sup>th</sup> (If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I?)*

Reflection 6: *April 1<sup>st</sup> on the article "Liberating Barabbas And the Things That Make for Peace"*

2. **Acts Paper (20%):** Read the book of Acts and write a paper that interprets the role and purpose of imprisonment in the book. Analyze the parallels between the growth of the church and the intensification of persecution for Christians who prophetically bear witness to the good news in response to a worldly empire with other priorities. Also reflect on any applications this has for today's world. This assignment should be 5 full (but no more than 6) pages in length. *Due: April 8<sup>th</sup>.*

### 3. Theology Paper (30%):

**Prompt:** Write a paper that responds to each of the questions below. Your paper should include an analysis of specific heresies, ethical or praxis gaps, and distorted theologies that have emerged in the U.S. Church, and the correctives as well as challenges provided by Black theology specifically. Interact with at least three of the course texts within your paper. Length: Your paper should be 7 full (but no more than 8) pages in length. *Due: April 22<sup>nd</sup>.*

1. Are there distinctive elements of a faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ that uniquely arise from Black faith, which edify the broader Body of Christ?

- a. If yes, explain what these distinctives elements are.
2. Why does Black faith matter presently, and not just historically?
3. Are there shortcomings in the Black faith tradition?
  - a. If yes, what are they?
  - b. How can they be responded to today?

#### **4. Liturgy (15%)**

Students will be asked to create a liturgy that could be proclaimed or demonstrated in worship, a communal setting, or the classroom that illustrates the unique role Black faith and theological insights have played in inspiring a holistic Gospel that empowers the Church to living into the call of Isaiah 58:12, to be known as repairer of the breach, and restorers of streets. This assignment should be 4 full (but no more than 5) pages in length.  
*Due 5-6.*

#### **5. Discussion (10%)**

Students are expected to integrate course assignments in classroom discussions and reflections. The description and expectations of quality engagement will be one of the five components that constitutes each student's final grade. We will have in person learning *the week of April 7-11<sup>th</sup> and all sessions are mandatory.*

#### **ADDITIONAL COURSE GUIDELINES**

For each week a paper is late, a letter grade will be deducted from the points that are possibly earned for the assignment.

#### **ATTENDANCE**

Students may miss up to two class sessions without penalty to their grade. If attendance is not possible (because student is in Healthcare Unit or (non-disciplinary) segregation), two sessions may be made up through correspondence, with approval of instructor. To request permission, students must contact instructor through internal mail and will be expected to submit alternate work via internal mail.

#### **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.

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 Emily Wagner, Director of Student Life and Formation, or review the full Title IX policy available in the Resource Room to 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 Emily Wagner directly through a sealed envelope.

Please refer to North Park's policy for reporting, contact information, and further details.

### INCOMPLETE GRADES

If, due to extenuating circumstances (specifically, illness, personal and family issues), 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

<b>Calendar of Due Dates</b>	<b>Reading/assigned content</b>	<b>Assignments to Turn In (<i>date in parathesis is the deadline for submitting the assignment</i>)</b>
<b>Week 1</b> January 13 -19 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read the book <i>Reading While Black</i></li> </ul>	<i>Reading While Black</i> reflection paper #1 due (1-21)
<b>Week 2</b> January 20 -26 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read the preface – section one—The Revolution is Here— pages xv-51 of the Acts commentary (Willie Jennings)</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 3</b> January 27 <sup>th</sup> - February 2 <sup>nd</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read the book <i>Subversive Witness</i></li> </ul>	<i>Subversive Witness</i> reflection paper #2 due (2-4)
<b>Week 4</b> February 3 – 9 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read "Letter from Birmingham Jail"</li> </ul>	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read the Birmingham News article by 8 white clergy.</li><li>• Read section two—The Struggle of Diaspora—of the Acts commentary. Pages 52- 101 (Willie Jennings).</li></ul>	
<b>Week 5</b> February 10 – 16 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read the book <i>The Cross and the Lynching Tree</i></li></ul>	<i>The Cross and the Lynching Tree</i> reflection paper #3 due (2-18)
<b>Week 6</b> February 17 – 23 <sup>rd</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read the Interview with Bryan Stevenson</li><li>• Explore the resource Million Dollar Blocks</li><li>• Read the section three—The Desire of God Exposed—of the Acts commentary. Pages 102 - 151 (Willie Jennings)</li></ul>	
<b>Week 7</b> February 24 – March 2 <sup>nd</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read the book <i>This Here Flesh</i></li></ul>	<i>This Here Flesh</i> reflection paper #4 due (3-4)
<b>Week 8</b> March 3 – 9 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read Chapter 3 of <i>How the Word is Passed</i></li><li>• Read section four—The Spirit and the End of Segregation—of the Acts commentary. Pages 152 - 202 (Willie Jennings)</li></ul>	
<b>Week 9</b> March 10 – 16 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read the book <i>If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I?</i></li></ul>	<i>If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I?</i> reflection paper #5 due (3-18)
<b>Week 10</b> March 17 – 23 <sup>rd</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read “Liberating Barabbas And the Things That Make for Peace”</li><li>• Read section six—The Disciple Citizen—of the Acts commentary. Pages</li></ul>	



	203 - 257 (Willie Jennings)	
<b>Week 11</b> March 24 – 30 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to/read “My Anger...”(Jennings)</li> <li>• Read the article “Whose Earth is it Anyway”</li> </ul>	“Liberating Barabbas And the Things That Make for Peace” reflection paper #6 due (4-1)
<b>Week 12</b> March 31-April 6 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on Acts paper</li> </ul>	Acts paper due (4-8)
<b>Week 13</b> April 7-13 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In person learning mandatory, must attend all sessions</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Week 14</b> April 14-20 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on theology paper</li> </ul>	Theology Paper due on (4-22)
<b>Week 15</b> April 21-27 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read “The Case for Reparations” by Ta-Nehisi Coates</li> <li>• Work on Liturgy Project</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 16</b> April 28-May 4 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on finishing any remaining assignments &amp; Liturgy Project</li> </ul>	Liturgy project due (5-6)
<b>Week 17</b> May 4 – 9 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Week</li> </ul>	

**Academic Integrity:** NPTS promotes a commitment to integrity in all areas of life. In the case of breaches of academic honesty such as plagiarism or cheating on examinations, the matter will be reported to the Dean of Faculty. Students should be advised that normally in cases of academic dishonesty or plagiarism the penalty can range from receiving a failing grade for the assignment to expulsion from the Seminary. For the full policy, please see the seminary academic catalog.

**NOTES**

1. Students are not permitted to miss any portion of the course’s required in person learning. In case of needed medical leave, the instructor must be notified by email or by phone.
2. The instructor reserves the right to modify the course to best accommodate the learning needs of the class.
3. NPTS encourages all students to follow the Statement of Inclusive Language of the ECC which states, “We are committed to being inclusive in language and imagery in an effort to eliminate prejudice, whether gender, racial, ethnic, national, religious, denominational, cultural, or physical. This way of proceeding in no manner seeks to deny personal



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identity; rather, it guards against any use of word or phrase that tends to exclude people.” Consider how you can best incorporate inclusive language into all of your communication (written and oral) during the course particularly in your references to God and to humanity.