Theological Reflection Group
Syllabus, Fall 2019

Tuesdays 3:00-4:20
Schlegel 122 (Plenary)
Schlegel 120, 121, 122 (sections)

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Description

The reflection groups provide a structure for students to engage in theological reflection on their full seminary experience with a range of conversation partners. In plenary meetings and in smaller sections, students will experience the value of face-to-face learning in community. They will be encouraged to make connections among different parts of the seminary's curriculum and community life, to deepen and clarify their sense of vocation, and to practice theological reflection and writing. The course will give considerable attention to systemic and cultural influences on what people believe and how they live out their faith commitments. The groups will meet in plenary sessions or in smaller sections, according to the syllabus.

Course Outcomes

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

1. Articulate their own theological perspective, mindful of the global, multicultural, multi-religious context of contemporary ministry, broadly defined;

2. Identify ways that that social and cultural systems shape human perceptions, beliefs, and experiences, including with regard to ethical issues and experiences of injustice;

3. Demonstrate skills for reading, writing, and individual as well as group *theological reflection* (understood as a generative conversation between tradition and experience); and

4. Exercise agency for their own education by choosing thoughtfully from among various learning opportunities, reflecting about them afterward, and identifying areas where growth or improvement is needed.

Each week, students will be assigned readings and/or reflective exercises in light of these goals. In addition, students will be asked to participate in some limited events outside of class (such as lectures or workshops). Students are advised to put these events on their calendars early to protect the time or identify any potential conflicts.

Required Textbook:

Patterson, Stephen J. *The Forgotten Creed: Christianity's Original Struggle against Bigotry, Slavery, and Sexism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. ISBN: 0190865822.

Expectations

As a graduate level course and as a spiritual practice, students are expected to attend all class sessions punctually and to participate in group discussions. Active participation includes, but is not limited to, coming to class prepared, listening carefully to others, asking relevant questions, responding to others' comments with respect, and inviting others into the conversation. Patterns of behavior to avoid include dominating a discussion, staying perpetually quiet, checking electronic devices, and arriving late.

In addition, students are expected to:

1. Learn how to use, develop, and maintain electronic portfolios through Digication. All assignments are to be saved to the student's computer or a flash drive and submitted through the portfolio portal. A printed copy should be brought to class.

2. Complete all assignments on time (in advance of the class when due), and in a way that demonstrates thoughtfulness and accountability to the task.

3. Conduct a community engagement examen (description below).

Examen of Consciousness (in relation to life with others—assign yourself)

Life together is fundamental to spiritual life and practice. Many aspects of who we are, how we learn, and the ways we know God's grace emerge in community.

This semester, we ask you to track your engagement with others, but this time, you choose the realm. You may want to continue the practice from the fall semester, paying attention to your LPTS involvement beyond the classroom. But feel free to choose another realm, for example:

> Church/congregational life
> Life with family and friends
> Work relationships
> Civic or political life
> Life with those sharing a particular interest (e.g. prayer group, ultimate team, trivia club, musical group, running partners)

At the end of the semester you will conduct an Examen, prayerfully reflecting upon where you experienced the movements of God (grace, meaning, love, energy, challenge, spiritual fruits) in your life through your engagement and where you did not.

Again, this will be a self-evaluation (not teacher evaluation). You do NOT need to submit a log, but you WILL submit a two-page summary of your reflection. As in the fall, more involvement is not inherently better. For example, some may reflect upon the need to be less involved; others more. Some may reflect upon the frustrations of not being able to be more involved with friends, for example, because of church, work, or school obligations. In the end, this is a prayer practice with the hope of becoming more aware of the movements of God in your life with others.

Grading

This course is graded Pass/Fail. A passing grade requires each student to:

- Meet the expectations listed above
- Complete each assignment
- Notify professors before class of any need to be absent or late (as in case of illness)

Calendar

Assignments are due by class time on the dates under which they are listed. More guidance for each assignment will be given in advance of the class when the assignment is due. See Appendix 3 for a description of Student Guided Small Group Sessions.

February 11 – Introduction to Course (plenary)

February 18 – No class. Plan to attend at least one event for the Black Church Studies Consultation.

February 25 – Students attend presentation by prospective Dean (plenary)

March 3 – Discuss Black Church Studies consultation (sections)
  - *In advance of class, prepare a 500-word essay reflecting on the Black Church Studies Consultation session(s) you attended. UPLOAD TO DIGICATION.*

March 10 - Preparing for student-guided discussions (sections)

March 17 (Research and Study – No class)

March 24 – Student-guided discussion (sections) *Leaders upload to Digication*

March 31 - Student-guided discussion (sections) *Leaders upload to Digication*

April 7 - Student-guided discussion (sections)
  - *By this date, read the Grawemeyer book. Prepare ten questions. These can be questions that you would ask the author, or that would be suitable for leading a discussion group. UPLOAD TO DIGICATION.*

April 14 – Grawemeyer winner in class! (plenary)

April 21 – Student-guided discussion (sections) *Leaders upload to Digication*

April 28 - Student-guided discussion (sections) *Leaders upload to Digication*

May 5 – Discuss students' Examen essay, and reflection on the course (plenary)
  - *Prepare 2-page summary of your Examen experience (you do not need to submit a log). UPLOAD TO DIGICATION.*

APPENDIX 1:
Statement on Portfolios

An academic portfolio is a digital collection of artifacts created, managed, and, at times, shared by a student. These artifacts may include, but are not limited to, academic essays, blog posts, sermons, creative writings, recordings, etc. More than merely a collection of artifacts, however, a portfolio provides opportunities for reflection and further learning. Throughout their time at Louisville Seminary, students will maintain portfolios that will serve various purposes.

1. Student Purposes
Portfolios provide a virtual space for students to examine and reflect on their learning and thereby to enhance their intellectual, spiritual, and professional development as they progress through their degree programs. Portfolios also provide opportunities for students to learn how to curate a professional self-presentation. A portfolio remains the student's property after graduation, and it can have career-related purposes at that time.

2. Pedagogical/Course Purposes
Some courses may require students to utilize portfolios for pedagogical purposes and course-specific goals.

3. Effectiveness Purposes
Sampled, unidentified artifacts from portfolios will be reviewed annually by faculty for degree program assessment and improvement. With this in mind, students should not include anything in their portfolios that they would not want someone else to read. While this annual review is not designed to provide feedback to individual students, the feedback it provides to the faculty regarding course design, curriculum content, and other matters of the seminary learning environment will have lasting importance and improve the learning experience of future students.

APPENDIX 2:
Course Policies

Academic Honesty
All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others (including words of other students) must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism (regardless of whether the borrowing was intentional), and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For more information, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

Citation Policy
Citations in your papers should follow Louisville Seminary standards, which are based on these guides:

- American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010.
- Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 8th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- *The Chicago Manual of Style*. 16th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

Attendance Policy:
According to the Louisville Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. ***Two or more absences may result in a failing grade in the course.***

Special Accommodations
Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center (bherrintonhodge@lpts.edu) during the first few days of the course and should speak with the instructors as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructors.

Use of Inclusive Language:
In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. More discussion about inclusive language can be accessed from the Academic Support Center and from the section of the LPTS web site with information for current students.

Policy on late work: All portfolio assignments are due in advance of the class periods of the indicated date. Assignments submitted late will not be accepted.

Use of electronic devices in class: Many of us are becoming increasingly addicted to our electronics such that we are unable to focus on other (more important) matters for a period of time. Thus, we ask that we create a time and space to set aside such distractions as email, Facebook, and texting in order to engage our minds and hearts. Do not send or read text messages during class. Cell phones should be silenced and/or turned off and put away. In the event that you have a legitimate need to be accessible during class, you may ask the instructors for an exception to this rule. Laptops should not be used if you cannot trust yourself to restrict your use to note-taking. You may not access the Internet during class time unless directly relevant to class purposes. Any misuse of electronic devices during class time, including checking of email or social networking sites, will be grounds for dismissal from the session.

APPENDIX 3:
Instructions for Student Guided Small Group Sessions

In the spirit of course outcome 4, to "exercise agency for their own education," students will lead discussions of subjects you feel would be helpful to explore. These sessions will constitute most of the second half of the semester (5 sessions).

By March 10, you will find one or two other students with whom to work for a total of 5 teams per Reflection Small Group. Each team will lead once. Each team will propose a subject on March 10th, and the time in the Reflection Small Group will be devoted to negotiating topics and dates and an initial brainstorming in your teams for ways of exploring the subject.

At least one week before your team leads, your team will consult with your professor about your plan. The plan could be a set of discussion questions, but it could also involve a set of tasks (for example, asking students to freewrite for a few minutes about a subject, make a collage, pray, create a game, discuss a prompt with one other person, or write a poem). You will NOT be asking students to do homework ahead of time. You will NOT be lecturing or presenting lots of information. You ARE guiding a group reflection.

What kinds of subjects are good?
Ones that draw upon issues from classes, community life, spiritual/religious formation, vocational practice, or areas your team is passionate about. But the goal is to explore subjects theologically in light of what you are learning and reflecting upon in your various degree programs. How do theological ideas, religious practices, areas of research, practices of care, church history, the Bible, or convictions about God intersect with the subject?

Examples (would need a sharper focus):

Friendship	Prophetic ministry
Suffering	Images of God
Caring for children	Creation and the environment
Prayer	Racism/antiracism
Worship life	Money
Music	Hospitality
Gender identity	Food
The arts	Vocation
A cultural conflict	Emotional life
Rest	Imagination
Theological doctrine (e.g. incarnation,	Death/dying
resurrection, imago Dei)	Body

The class goal for March 10 will be for each Reflection Group to finalize teams, establish a robust diversity of subjects, and create a schedule for team leadership.