

LUTHERAN SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT CHICAGO

Creation in the City

January 2018

Room 202

Instructor:

Dr. Lea F. Schweitz (lschweitz@lstc.edu)

Office hours: By appointment

Course Description: This course is designed for learners to explore the doctrine of creation taking into account contemporary scientific perspectives (e.g., cosmology and evolution) and sociological trajectories (e.g., the rapid urbanization of the planet). As an interdisciplinary course, learners will engage diverse theological traditions, philosophy of nature, natural history, urban ecology, the social sciences, and contemporary media.

This course offers learners an opportunity to survey and to explore a major theological doctrines and methods, gain understanding of their significance, and develop the critical skills necessary for making constructive theological arguments. This course aims to help students discover and nurture their own theological voice in a way that is both authentic and responsible to Christian theological traditions. Finally, it explores diverse expressions of spiritual practices that are sustained and nurtured by experiences in nature, particularly urban nature.

Relationship to Enhancing Life: Despite the uncertainties and vulnerabilities of the future, current trends toward urbanization suggest that the future is sure to be an urban one. How can a public church respond to and effect positive change in ways that enhance the lives of city dwellers – now and in the future? This course explores the resources for enlarging theological and pastoral imaginations to engage the Creator God through experiences of nature in the city in order to re-envision ideas of nature and theologies of nature for enhancing lives – both human and nonhuman lives – in the city.

Course Rationale:

Creation in the City meets LSTC's curricular goals by providing learning opportunities for a student to develop and to demonstrate:

- Knowledge of and ability to communicate his/her Christian heritage in its rich diversity (LSTC MATS Learning Outcome #3) and in its Lutheran expressions (LSTC MDiv/MAM Learning Outcome #3); and
- Thinking that is contextual, culturally sensitive, and creatively engaging a pluralistic world as it interprets the message of the gospel (LSTC MDiv/MAM Learning Outcome #4) or faith and theological heritages (LSTC MATS Learning Outcome #4)

Although this course is an opportunity to focus on theological study, it is assumed that theology is always in a reciprocal relationship with spiritual formation, biblical exegesis, and visionary ministerial and public leadership. As such, this course serves LSTC's curricular goals by providing students the opportunity to integrate theological study with:

- The embodiment of spiritual vitality and personal/professional integrity (LSTC Learning Outcome #1);
- An understanding of the Bible that is thorough and comprehensive (LSTC MATS Learning Outcome #2) in order to effectively communicate and embody the witness of Scripture in ministry (LSTC MDiv/MAM Learning Outcome #2); and
- Skills for leadership in worship, preaching, outreach, pastoral care, education, (LSTC MDiv/MAM Learning Outcome #5) and equipping others for ministry (LSTC MDiv Learning Outcome #6).

Course Learning Outcomes:

Learners will be able to:

- Describe theological methods and articulate one's own understanding of the task of theology with respect to them;
- Find contemporary and classical theological resources;
- Summarize and discuss a range of theological perspectives (both contemporary and historical) of the doctrine of creation;
- Analyze (and assess) contemporary and classical theological resources;
- Connect theological resources to contemporary culture, media, communities, and/or experience;
- Analyze (and assess) theological resources in light of contemporary culture, media, communities, and/or experience;
- Analyze (and assess) contemporary culture, media, communities, and/or experiences in light of theological resources;
- Articulate important moments in one's own theological development and spiritual formation;
- Construct and justify one's own understanding of the doctrine of creation in the urban context;
- Situate one's understanding of the doctrine of creation in relation to other contemporary and historical alternatives; and,
- Communicate the "results" of theological analysis in both oral and written forms.
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Strategies for Learning:

In order to deliver the outcomes listed above, we will:

- Survey theological methods;

- Critically review contemporary and historical theological perspectives;
- Situate contemporary theological alternatives to the historical discussions;
- Relate contemporary and historical theological perspectives to one's own theological contexts; and
- Improve student's skills not only in theological thinking but also in theological leadership

Students will be required to:

- Read (carefully and critically) all assigned readings;
- Attend and participate in all class meetings;
- Complete 6 warm-up exercises;
- Write and revise a response to the question, "What metaphor describes you as a theologian?" (2-3 pages);
- Prepare and present one theological sightings exercise for class discussion (10 minutes);
- Lead your learning community in an integrative, constructive discussion; and
- Write three papers on assigned topics (5-6 pages each).

Course Assessment:

Student grades will be determined as follows:

Assignment	Points	Total (4000 pts)
Individual Participation Attendance Warm Up Exercises	(-20 pts/class missed) 50 pts/exercise; 5 total	250 pts 250 pts
Learning Communities Theological Sightings Discussion Leader	250 pts 250 pts; 2 total	750 pts
Papers on Assigned Topics	750 pts/paper; 3 total	2250 pts
Metaphor Response Paper	500 pts	500 pts

Students will have many opportunities to provide valuable assessment and evaluation of the course and the instructor. These include "critical incident questionnaires," a mid-term course evaluation, and a final course evaluation. LSTC requires students to submit a final course evaluation on LSTCnet before his/her grade is released. As part of the Enhancing Life Project, an additional course evaluation will be requested for the purposes of the grant.

Bibliography:

- Albertson, David and Cabell King. 2010. *Without Nature? A New Condition for Theology*. New York: Fordham University Press. (selections)
- Baker Fletcher, Karen. 1998. *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation*. Minneapolis; Fortress.
- Bauman, Whitney. 2014. *Religion and Ecology: Developing a Planetary Ethic*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Case-Winters, Anna. 2007. *Reconstructing a Christian Theology of Nature Down to Earth*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishers.
- Hefner, Philip. 2015. "An Idea of Nature: A Bipolar Proposal," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. 1993. *God in Creation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Sheldrake, Philip. 2014. *The Spiritual City: Theology, Spirituality, and the Urban*. Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA : Wiley Blackwell.
- Thistlethwaite, Susan B. and Engle, Mary Potter. 1990. *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*. New York: Harper & Row. (selections)
- Contemporary media: Orion Magazine, Christian Century, The Lutheran, Sightings, Chicago Tribune, NY Times, Speaking of Faith, YouTube, Scientific American, Rabiolab, City Creatures Blog, and others.

At least one of the following:

- Beisner, Beatrix, Christian Messier, and Luc-Alain Giraldeau. 2013. *Nature All Around Us: A Guide to Urban Ecology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cronon, William. 1992. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Dixon, Terrell F., ed. 2002. *City Wilds: Essays and Stories about Urban Nature*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Greenberg, Joel. 2004. *A Natural History of the Chicago Region*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hill, Libby. 2000. *The Chicago River: A Natural and Unnatural History*. Chicago: Lake Claremont Press.
- Jacobs, Jane. 1992. *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sullivan, Jerry. 2004. *Hunting for Frogs on Elston, and Other Tales from Field & Street*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Submitting Required Work:

1. Warm up exercises and papers must be submitted to the instructor in hard copy by the deadline. Double-sided and recycled printing is welcomed.
2. All papers must be typed, double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman font, using Chicago/Turabian bibliographic format. Citation guides may be found here:
 - a. Chicago Manual of Style quick guide:
www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html
 - b. Turabian Style quick guide:
www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html
3. This class abides by LSTC's academic honor system. Please see below.

Commitments and Contexts for our Work:

LSTC Mission, Vision, and Values:

- Forms visionary leaders to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.
- Seeks to build up the Body of Christ and work for a world of peace and justice that cares for the whole creation.
- Christ-centered, Responsive to context, Attentive to diversity, and Committed to excellence.

LSTC's Marks: Urban, Ecumenical, University-Related, Global, Multicultural, Interfaith

Guidelines for Civility: (Student Handbook 2010-2011, p 27)

LSTC has adopted the following guidelines developed by the Diversity Committee for talking and living together as a diverse community of theological and faith reflection. Divergent thoughts and opinions can produce healthy, life giving exchanges of ideas and beliefs; they can also produce conflict and disorder. Our hope is that our life together can be shaped by consistent use of the guidelines listed below.

- a. Respect the personhood of others, while engaging their ideas.
- b. Carefully represent the views of those with who we are in disagreement.
- c. Be careful in defining terms, avoiding needless use of inflammatory words.
- d. Be careful in the use of generalizations; where appropriate use specific evidence.
- e. Seek to understand the experiences out of which others have arrived at their view. Hear the stories of others as we share our own.
- f. Exercise care that expressions of personal offense at the differing opinion of others not be used as means of inhibiting dialogue.
- g. Be a patient listener before formulating responses.
- h. Be open to change in our own position and patient with the process of change in the thinking and behavior of others.
- i. Make use of facilitators and mediators where communication can be served by it.
- j. Always remember that people are defined, ultimately, by their relationship with God – not by the flaws we discover or think we discover in their views and actions.

Adapted from "Guidelines for Civility in the United Methodist Church" which Professor Linda E. Thomas co-authored with other members of the Blue Ribbon Committee studying sexuality in the United Methodist Church in 1992.

THREE ACADEMIC POLICIES

LSTC academic policies may be found in the *Student Handbook* and its academic supplements for LSTC's respective degree programs (located online on LSTCNet under "Student Services").

1. Students living with disabilities. LSTC is committed to assist students living with a disability to thrive in our academic and campus life together. Students are invited to discuss

opportunities for living into this partnership with the instructor, and are encouraged to do so in the first two weeks of the semester. Please consult the *LSTC Student Handbook* for policies and procedures for course accommodations (pp. 130-132).

2. Attendance reports. At the outset of a course, faculty members are required to report students who do not attend the beginning class period. Faculty members also are required to submit reports of a second unexcused absence to the Registrar. The Registrar is required to forward this report to the Financial Aid Office (this new policy will be in future iterations of the *Student Handbook*).
3. Academic honor system. Instructors expect that students will present their own original work for evaluation, providing written acknowledgement of sources used in the writing of papers and examinations through footnotes, endnotes, and other kinds of acknowledgement appropriate to the subject being reported. Presenting another's work, from whatever the source (e.g., the Internet, a peer, or hard copy texts) as if it is one's own is called plagiarism, which is generally considered a serious offense in the academic community. Students needing assistance with avoiding plagiarism and learning about methods for proper citations have many sources of help: the JKM Library and its staff, particularly Barry Hopkins and Chris Wenderoth, who are trained in these areas, personal assistance at the Language Resource and Writing Center (LRWC) as well as many print and online resources. Students are encouraged to consult the latest edition of Kate Turabian's *Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. See also online resources, e.g., <http://www.turabian.com/turabian/index.html>. See pp. 129-130 of the *2011-12 LSTC Student Handbook* for the full description of academic honesty.

Creation in the City Preliminary Outline of Assignments

Warm Up Exercises

Assignment: For each exercise, please read the warm up exercise and dedicate approximately 30 minutes to reflecting or to discussion on the exercise. Please complete this exercise in whatever way supports your best and/or most authentic theological thinking. Please allot some portion of this time to capturing your thoughts, again, in whatever form best supports your thinking. (Examples might include a mind map, a written reflection, a conversation with a theological buddy, or others.) For each exercise, a prompt for your thinking will be provided from one of the following resources:

Chase, Steven. 2011. *A Field Guide to Nature as Spiritual Practice*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Danaan, Clea. 2009. *Voices of the Earth: The Path of Green Spirituality*. Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publishers.

Kim, Grace Ji-Sun. 2014. *Contemplations from the Heart: Spiritual Reflections on Family, Community, and the Divine*. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Lescher, Bruce and Elizabeth Liebert, eds. 2006. *Exploring Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM*. New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

This assignment supports the following course learning outcomes:

- Describe theological methods and articulate one's own understanding of the task of theology with respect to them;
- Articulate important moments in one's own theological development;
- Construct and justify one's own understanding of each theological loci; and,
- Communicate the "results" of theological analysis in both oral and written forms.

Assessment: Points for this assignment will be awarded upon completion. Please provide the instructor with some evidence of your completed assignment on the due date listed on the syllabus.

Theological Metaphor Paper

Assignment: Write a short paper that answers the following question: "What metaphor describes you as a theologian?"

It is expected that the response paper draft will describe the theological metaphor, including both the "is" and the "is not" of the metaphor, explain how the metaphor is theological, be creative, and exhibit excellent writing mechanics. (See #1, 2, 5, and 6 below). Your draft may be 1-2 pages in length. Your final response should be expanded to approximately 3 pages. It should address all of the items listed below (#1-6). You are invited to revise your draft paper, as necessary.

This assignment supports the following course learning outcomes:

- Find contemporary and classical theological resources;
- Connect theological resources to contemporary culture, media, communities, and/or experience;

- Analyze (and assess) theological resources in light of contemporary culture, media, communities, and/or experience;
- Analyze (and assess) contemporary culture, media, communities, and/or experiences in light of theological resources;
- Articulate important moments in the history of theology and in one's own theological development; and
- Communicate the "results" of theological analysis in both oral and written forms.

Assessment: Your final response paper should include the following in a 2-3 page paper:

1. Description of theological metaphor and its limits (the "is" and the "is not" of the metaphor);
2. Explanation of the metaphor as theological (how is the metaphor a theological metaphor?);
3. Analysis of metaphor a tool of discovery (what did the metaphor reveal about theology?);
4. Application of metaphor to your contexts (how does this metaphor issue from or apply to your context?);
5. Creativity; and
6. Good writing mechanics and proper citations.

Papers on Assigned Topics

Assignment: During the semester, students will be assigned questions and paper topics related to the course readings. Students are expected to write three papers addressing an assigned question or topic. Each paper should be approximately 5-6 pages. Recall that all papers should be typed, double spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman font, using Chicago/Turabian bibliographic format. For more information on appropriate bibliographic format, please refer to the resources listed on the syllabus.

This assignment supports the following course learning outcomes:

- Analyze (and assess) contemporary and classical theological resources;
- Connect theological resources to contemporary culture, media, communities, and/or experience;
- Analyze (and assess) theological resources in light of contemporary culture, media, communities, and/or experience;
- Articulate important moments in the history of theology and in one's own theological development; and,
- Communicate the "results" of theological analysis in in both oral and written forms.

Assessment: These papers will be assessed using a writing rubric.

Theological Sightings

Assignment: Prepare a presentation of a theological sighting for group discussion. Presentations should be ***no more*** than 8-10 minutes in length. A successful presentation will clearly describe the purported theological sighting and persuasively argue for why the sighting may be considered a *theological* sighting. Your listeners should be able to answer both of these questions: what was the theological sighting? Why did the presenter think it was theological?

This assignment supports the following course learning outcomes:

- Find contemporary and classical theological resources;
- Analyze (and assess) contemporary and classical theological resources;
- Connect theological resources to contemporary culture, media, communities, and/or experience;
- Analyze (and assess) theological resources in light of contemporary culture, media, communities, and/or experience;
- Analyze (and assess) contemporary culture, media, communities, and/or experiences in light of theological resources;
- Articulate important moments in one's own theological development;
- Construct and justify one's own understanding of each theological loci; and
- Communicate the "results" of theological analysis in both oral and written forms.

Assessment: These presentations will be assessed your peers and the instructors using a presentation rubric.