

Interpretation and Imagination in 'Postliberal' Theology
SAH-TH6/753
Spring 2019
Thursday 9-12 a.m.

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Purpose:

Postliberal theology features imagination in both critical and constructive theological endeavour. In this course we will examine the work of a range of Postliberal theologians, philosophers, pastoral theologians and biblical scholars on the role and limitation of imagination across the theological curriculum. Particular attention is paid to the intellectual conditions that have led to the importance of imagination in theology, to the role of revelation and scripture in forming and funding imagination and to the prophetic function of 'faithful' imagination in preaching, pastoral practice, biblical interpretation, ethics and social action.

Competence Objectives:

In completing this course a student will be able to:

- (1) Describe the intellectual and cultural conditions that have led to the priority of imagination in contemporary theology and religious studies.
- (2) Identify, articulate and critically assess the 'Postliberal' deployment of imagination in theological disciplines.
- (3) Engage 'formed' imagination to 'reframe' a contemporary challenge/problem/issue/event that aims at critical purchase and transformed practice. Students can do this by means of a sermon, a paper, a fine arts project, poetry, music, liturgy or another modality approved by the professor. This is an exercise in what post-liberal theology calls 'deliberate misreading.'

Format:

This class meets once a week for three hours over the January to April spring semester. The primary format will be lecture followed by seminar discussion of the texts read for the day. We will 'read' examples of imagination formed for social protest by means of artistic expression. Students will raise questions and enter into discussion based on a careful reading of the required texts.

Expectations/Evaluation:

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- (1) Class attendance and preparation of all required reading before class.
- (2) An outline of the reading for the day which concludes with a single question for class discussion, debate or clarification beginning the second meeting of the course. The outline should provide a clear overview of the entire reading and the question should demonstrate charitable and insightful reading.
- (3) A book review of 5 double-spaced pages at 12 point font of either the Kelsey or Brueggemann textbook. The review should be equally divided between a summary of the

contents of the book and a critical analysis of its contents. **Due first class after reading week** (March 14)

- (4) A paper, fine arts, Power Point, musical project or sermon that is an exercise in imaginative reframing ('a deliberate misreading') of an event, topic, crisis or challenge for transformative practice. Here you are being called on to be the prophet, to de-realize current arrangements by means of imaginative re-depiction and re-description. (All of our text books provide examples of this expectation –the Kelsey book is an extended example of it. See also Flannery O'Conner, 'Revelation,' in the bibliography). Papers, projects, compositions or sermons should be about 8-10 double spaced pages at 12 point font (2500-3000 words). The bibliography should include 10 entries beyond course texts. **Due the last day of term** (April 16 for graduating students; April 26 for all others)

INT800

- (1) Expectations 1 and 2 above.
- (2) Expectation 3 above should be a 10 page comparison (3000 words) of two treatments of theological/religious imagination. In this case, two treatments on the theme will be read, compared and contrasted. Students may select chapters and articles from the bibliography of the course or suggest their own, subject to the approval of the professor. The amount of reading to be done in preparation for this comparison is between 60-90 pages. The outline should include: (1) an introduction; (2) an exposition of two sources on the place of imagination in theology, including the identification of two issues of contrast; (3) a critical comparison and; (4) a brief conclusion. **Due first class after reading week** (March 14).
- (3) Expectation 4 (above) will be fulfilled by INT800 students in a class presentation and paper. The same project of 'imaginative reframing' is required but it will be a one-hour presentation to the entire class later in the term. Power Point, lecture, sermon, music and/or the plastic arts can be engaged for this presentation. The schedule for presentations will be arranged after the first meeting of the class. Each INT800 student should schedule a meeting with the professor to discuss their presentation well in advance. A hard copy of about 15 pages in length, which formed the basis for the presentation, will be submitted for evaluation in tandem with the presentation. A bibliography of 15-20 entries beyond course texts is expected. **The written component is due the last day of the semester.**

Deadlines:

Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus for each course. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment. Repeated failure to submit assignments on time may affect the final grade for the course.

Required Texts/Readings:

Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*. Minneapolis, 2012.
Kelsey, David H. *Imagining Redemption*. Louisville, 2005.

Course readings on Canvas – access codes provided.