REL 2002 Practical Theology and Religion in Global Context

Theology and Practice Seminar I

Fall 2007/ Thursdays 11 AM-1 PM
Vanderbilt University Graduate Department of Religion

Participants

GDR Faculty
Ellen Armour, Theological Studies
Herbert Marbury, Hebrew Bible
Bonnie Miller-McLemore, Religion, Psychology, and Culture (primary facilitator-Fall)
Ted Smith, Ethics and Society (primary facilitator-Spring)

Area Ministers
Paula Hoos, Pastor, Trinity United Methodist Church
Tom Laney, United Methodist Pastor
James C. Pace, Professor of Nursing and Chaplain, Vanderbilt University Medical Center
Victor M. Singletary, Pastor, First Baptist Capitol Hill Church

1st Year Fellows in Theology and Practice
Brad Daugherty, Historical Studies
Gerald Liu, Homiletics and Liturgics
Brandon McCormack, Homiletics and Liturgics
Elizabeth Madden, Religion, Psychology, and Culture
Kelly Whitcomb, Hebrew Bible

2nd Year Fellows in Theology and Practice
Jin-Young Choi, New Testament
Angela Cowser, Ethics and Society
Sean Hayden, Theological Studies
Kate Lassiter, Religion, Psychology, and Culture
Asante Todd, Ethics and Society
Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, Theological Studies

Presuppositions and Purpose

Eschatological Aim
The seminar brings together doctoral students, area ministers, and faculty with the lofty aim of enriching the life of Christian faith for the sake of the world. Of course, this is an aim at the most general, even eschatological level and it is shared by parties well beyond this seminar. Under the best circumstances, lively embodiment of the Christian faith is the hope of both the church and theological education operating in response to God’s grace and call.

Of course, many obstacles subvert this aim. In the last century, theological education has been particularly troubled by a growing distance between academic theology and religious practice.
Educators and students are distracted by other important objectives, such as the study of doctrine, the production of scholarship, or the training of clergy, and overlook the wisdom of actual practitioners of the faith. Meanwhile, parishioners, ministers, non-profit leaders, and activists often feel disenfranchised from the scholarship of the academy and distracted by the immediate tasks of running institutions.

Deans, professors, ministers, and endowment officers have attempted to address this loss of vision and gap between academic and practical wisdom at almost all levels except doctoral education (e.g., through new seminary programs for formation, new church programs for transitioning into ministry, experiments in field and contextual education). This course is part of an effort to address the challenge at the doctoral level and is a key component of the Graduate Department of Religion’s Program in Theology and Practice.

More Proximate Aims
For each group involved, the course has more circumspect hopes. First, it affords doctoral students an opportunity to consider how this wider aim shapes their vocation for seminary teaching during their doctoral work rather than when they arrive on a seminary campus or reach the end of a career devoted to scholarship. Second, it provides a forum for the continued formation of the graduate school’s own faculty around the enrichment of Christian faith and teaching for ministry. Third, it engages the wisdom of local ministers, challenging the usual division of labor in doctoral education that keeps practitioners at a distance. The grant supporting this work describes these aims in terms of three needs—the need to socialize future faculty to theological education, the need for our own faculty to model the integration they desire in students, and the need to develop practice at reading situations theologically.

Initial Means
The two-semester course employs two primary means toward these ends: (1) close reading of literature in practical theology, an area of study that has laid ground for the moves of the course; and (2) collaborative study of a jointly chosen problem in religious practice, ministry, or the interaction of ministry and the wider society (e.g., Christian and cultural views of the body). Our work will involve reading and conversation across disciplines and areas of expertise, immersion in local contexts, presentation of studies of the problem, elaboration of concrete proposals for addressing the problem, and writing and publication of findings.

These are not the only means to our larger aim or our more circumspect hopes and we may discover other means over the course of our time together. But they provide a foundation on which to build. Over the past three decades, the scope and definition of practical theology has expanded. Practical theology is no longer simply a discipline concerned with the application of dogma, the use of social sciences to guide ecclesial practice, or the implementation of congregational polity and ministry. It has been reinterpreted as (1) a field of study; (2) a method of doing theology that extends beyond the field to other academic areas and to ministry; and (3) an activity of faithful practitioners in families, religious communities, and wider public spheres. This redefinition of practical theology calls for imaginative new ways of engaging scholarship and teaching in the learning, doing, and embodying of Christian faith across all of the conventional curricular areas of theological education. Thus, in a word, the purpose of the two-semester course is to study and engage in practical theology richly-redefined.
General Objectives
Help participants understand the field of practical theology and the ways it might be important for ministries of many kinds:
1. familiarize ourselves with practical theology literature, its definitions, recent history, methods, and goals
2. understand the theological and philosophical issues articulated by practical theology
3. explore the relevance of practical theology for theological education, faith life in congregations, and religion in the public sphere

Form participants who can do practical theology in their home disciplines or ministries:
- foster cross-disciplinary conversation around lived religion and faith
- explore connections between scholarship and ministry
- explore ways to engage religious life and practice theologically and consider new ways to do theology
- engage in the doing of practical theology through interdisciplinary study of concrete problems in ministry

Outline of Sessions and Reading
Week 1/August 30  Introductions to Course and Each Other
PRACTICAL THEOLOGY INTENSIVE
Week 2/Sept. 6  Practical theology intensive: Definition and Background
Burkhart, “Schleiermacher’s Vision for Theology”
Cahalan, “Beyond Pastoral Theology”
Farley, “Theology and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm”
Maddox, “The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline”
Miller-McLemore, “Practical Theology”
Miller-McLemore, “The ‘Clerical Paradigm’: A Fallacy”

Comments on reading:
Add’l supportive reading: Farley, Theologia

Week 3/Sept. 13  Practical theology intensive: Overviews
Cahalan, “Three Approaches to Practical Theology”
Fulkerson, “Theology and the Lure of the Practical”
Maddox, “Practical Theology: A Discipline in Search of a Definition”
Miller-McLemore, “Practical Theology and Pedagogy”
Rahner, “Practical Theology within the Totality of Theological Disciplines”

Comments on reading:
**Add'l supportive reading:** Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*

**MODULE 1  Bodies and Mortality: Faith, Ministry, and Theology**

**Week 4/ Sept. 20**  On-site Case Study: Body, mortality, and congregational care  
Nhc Funeral Home (Fairground St., Franklin)  
Virginia Eldrege  

Killen, *Pastoral Care in the Small Membership Church*  
Holloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories: A Memorial*  
McDannell and Lang, *Heaven: A History*

**Week 5/Sept. 27**  Critical theological reflection on the site and case study  

- Selected Biblical passages  
- Funeral liturgies  
- Long, [Ted: name which article/s on preaching at funerals?]  

Comments on reading:

**Week 6/Oct. 4**  Theological reflection (continued)  

- Laderman, *Rest in Peace*  
- Mitford, *The American Way of Death Revisited*

Comments on reading:

**Week 7/Oct. 11**  On-site Case Study: Body, mortality, and congregational care  
Williamson Memorial Funeral Home and Gardens (Franklin)  
David Stephens and Pam Stephens  

Lynch, *The Undertaking*

**Week 8/Oct. 18**  Presentation and discussion of short essays on the site and case  

*Due:* 5-7 pp. (2100 words max) paper engaging reading and experiences of module

**PRACTICAL THEOLOGY INTENSIVE**

**Week 9/Oct. 25**  Practical theology intensive: A Sampling of Methods  
Browning, “Toward a Fundamental and Strategic Practical Theology”  
Dykstra, “Reconceiving Practice”  
Farley, “Interpreting Situations”  
Metz, “The Concept of a Political Theology”  
Chopp, Rebecca. “Practical Theology and Liberation”  
Van der Ven, “An Empirical Approach in Practical Theology”

Comments on reading:
Add'l supportive reading: Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*

**MODULE 2**  
**Bodies and Punishment: Faith, Ministry, and Theology**

**Week 10/Nov. 1**  
On-site study: Body, capital punishment, and congregational action  
Brad [Victor: Last name?]  
First Baptist Capitol Hill Church

- Selected Biblical passages  
- Banner, *The Death Penalty*  
- Selections from *Furman v. Georgia*  
- Selections from Liebman, *A Broken System*

**Week 11/Nov. 8**  
Critical theological reflection on the site and case study

- Taylor, *The Executed God*  
- John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

Comments on reading:

**Week 12/Nov. 15**  
Theological reflection (continued)

- Wray, *Restorative Justice*  
- Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*  
- Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

Comments on reading:

**Thanksgiving Break**

**Week 13/Nov. 29**  
On-site study: Body, capital punishment, & congregational action  
Riverbend Maximum Security Institution

- Prejean, *Dead Man Walking* (book or film) OR Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying*

**Week 14/Dec. 6**  
Presentation and discussion of short essays on the site and case  
*Due: 5-7 pp. (2100 words max) paper engaging reading and experiences of module*

*Final paper, Due Dec. 13:* 10 pp. (3000 word max) reflective essay exploring how the reading in practical theology and the collaborative study of religious practices and ministry with bodies, mortality, and capital punishment (site visits, reading, discussion, etc.) has changed or shaped your thoughts about your future teaching of ministry students
Site Visit Modules

Four modules of observation and reflection make up the bulk of the two-semester course. Each module has a common internal structure:

**Week 1 Encounter**
The seminar will visit an important site for the ministry under consideration. Readings will prepare us for the visit. While at the site we might visit with a variety of local experts. A practitioner will lead the session. The encounter should generate a host of conversations about bodies, faith, and ministry.

**Weeks 2-3 Reflection**
The seminar will meet in a classroom at Vanderbilt. Readings will help us go deeper in the conversations generated by the encounter. Faculty, ministers, and students will share leadership of the session. Participants should emerge from the reflection with refined questions and sensibilities for a second visit.

**Week 4 Encounter, again**
The seminar will visit the same or an important related site for the ministry under consideration. This second visit will provide a chance to test hypotheses, ask deeper questions, and look and listen for what we missed before. Readings will prepare us for the visit. While at the site we might visit with a variety of local experts. A practitioner will lead the session. The second encounter should give seminar participants some promising lines of thought to explore in writing.

**Week 5 Writing and teaching**
The module will culminate in student writing about the dynamics of ministry, faith, theology, and bodies in the ministry we have encountered. The seminar will meet in a classroom at Vanderbilt. Student participants in the seminar will bring essays to the seminar and share presentations from them. Other participants might bring writing of their own. Lively discussions will break out, and new wisdom will emerge in conversation.

The modules do not pretend to offer the deep kind of knowledge that might be gained from years of practice or sustained ethnographic study. Instead they should provide an introduction to the ministry under consideration and an impetus for future research. More specifically, they allow us to study how ministers and religious believers embody theology in the midst of life, how this embodiment might inform or challenge our outside reading and vice versa, and how future seminary educators might engage religious practice and ministry more fully in their own teaching. The repeated pattern structuring all four modules should help participants form habits that could guide work on entirely different topics. The pattern itself is a crucial part of the curriculum.

**Shared Expectations**
For all participants
Any reference to texts or scholars beyond those on the syllabus must be carefully and clearly explained as if talking with the general public.
Anyone can interrupt conversation to ask what is meant by any term at any time.
The class will be conducted in light of the Divinity School commitments
Participants should use inclusive language in writing and speaking.

For Area Ministers
Meet with faculty in the summer to plan as many of the readings as possible
Immerse participants in your ministry site (tour, presentation, resource people)
Host and lead the seminar for two visits
Serve as the expert about your site
Offer resources that help you do theology from your site (academic books, novels, poems, films, music, magazines, websites, rules of thumb whatever you actually use)
Do all the readings – both in practical theology and about other sites
Participate actively in every seminar session
Write essays as you wish

For Students
Hurl yourselves into the site visits and readings
Propose readings from your disciplines that could help the whole seminar answer our guiding questions for each site
Teach portions of the seminar as assigned
Participate actively in every seminar session
Write and post comments on OAK on the reading as assigned
Write four short essays (two each semester, one on each site)
Write one reflection paper at the end of the fall semester
Write (or co-author?) one chapter-length final essay at the end of the spring semester (possibly an expanded version of one of the short essays)

For Faculty
Meet with area ministers in the summer to set as many of the readings as possible
Take primary responsibility for proposing readings from your discipline that will help the whole seminar answer our guiding questions for each site
Work as a collegium to sort and select which of the proposed readings will be assigned to the seminar as a whole
Hurl yourselves into the site visits and readings
Teach portions of the seminar
Participate actively in every seminar session
Write (or co-author?) one chapter-length final essay


### Written Requirements for Students

- **Comments on reading** (posted on web and shared in class)
  
  Each student will write two 1-2 page comment papers on the readings that draw them together, make critical connections between them, and open up themes and questions for class discussion. They should be posted on OAK by 11 AM Wednesday prior to the relevant seminar. For class, students will flag key points and initiate the seminar conversation.

  Comments might explore questions like these: What are the major issues in the reading? How are the readings connected or at odds with each other? How do the readings speak to our experience and how does our experience modify/challenge the reading? How do the readings fit into the larger trajectory of the seminar on practical theology, seminary teaching, ministry, and Christian faith?

- **Two 5-7 pp double-spaced papers** (2100 words max.) *due Oct. 18 and Dec. 6* on theology, ministry, and the body that involve reflection on the experiences of the module and site, the shared reading, practical theology, and connections to your home discipline

  Papers might be guided by questions like these: How do particular readings help you understand the religious practices, faith commitments, and ministry of the site? How do the realities of the site contest the reading? What are some of the embedded theologies we encountered? How does one help future ministers hear such theologies? How does one help future ministers embody and convey their own theologies, honed through theological education? What does the module say about practical theology? How has the experience of the module reshaped your thoughts on the reading on practical theology and its meaning and aims?

- **10 pp. double-spaced reflective essay** (3000 words max.) *due December 13* exploring how the reading in practical theology and the collaborative study of religious practices and ministry with bodies, mortality, and capital punishment (site visits, reading, discussion, etc.) has changed and/or shaped your thoughts about your future teaching of ministry students

  Papers might be guided by questions like these: How do you understand the nature and implications of practical theology for teaching and seminary education? How have specific readings or experiences changed your expectations about seminary education and the place of your own discipline or the relevance of courses in your area of specialization? How would you organize a potential syllabus covering core texts in your field?
Course Reading (on library reserve and on order at the university bookstore)

Required
E-Reserve articles on practical theology posted on OAK (see list below**)

John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (Pauline Books)

Killen, James L. *Pastoral Care in the Small Membership Church* (Abingdon)

Lynch, Thomas. *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade* (Penguin)


Selections from the following books (to be posted on OAK):

Davis, Angela. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (Seven Stories Press)

Gaines, Ernest J. *A Lesson Before Dying* (Vintage)


McDannell, Colleen and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (Yale U Press)

Prejean, Helen. *Dead Man Walking* (Vintage)

Taylor, Mark Lewis. *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown American* (Fortress)

Wray, Harmon, *Restorative Justice: Moving Beyond Punishment* (General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church)

Background Reading
Ballard, Paul and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in Service of Church* (SPCK)

Browning, Don. *Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategica Proposals* (Fortress)

Farley, Edward, *Theologia* (Wipf and Stock)
**Articles on Practical Theology (posted on Oak)**

Browning, Don. “Toward a Fundamental and Strategic Practical Theology,” in *Practical Theology*, Friedrich Schweitzer and Johannes A. van der Ven, eds. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999).


Van der Ven, Johannes. “An Empirical Approach in Practical Theology,” in *Practical Theology*, Friedrich Schweitzer and Johannes A. van der Ven, eds. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999).