COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course is an exploration of the relationship between Christianity and the American Experiment. Historical, theological, cultural, political, and sociological questions will be addressed as they pertain to this relationship. The student will be introduced to both classical and contemporary Christianity as it has negotiated, participated in, and contributed to the American religious experience. While this course engages in a necessary brief historical overview of Christianity in the United States, it very quickly transcends this approach in favor of a more theological/Sociological approach. The emphasis, therefore, will be on a Theo-social analysis of contemporary America in light of recent writings. In particular we will be looking at the American individual and her relationship to the American public—politically, economically, socially, and religiously. While America is a religiously diverse culture, as the course title suggests, our primary critique focus will be that of Christian theology.

Online Note: This is an online course divided into 15 modules. Each module will include a short introductory video featuring the instructor providing a few tips for understanding the assigned readings and their context in the course. The modules will also indicate all assignments for that particular week. Students are welcome to communicate throughout the course with any course concerns.

CARLOW CORE CURRICULUM THEMES:

1. **Reflection on Learning:** Theology employs a reflective methodology. The student will read, think, write, and speak reflectively, weekly and monthly, by which she/he will address the critical questions about Christianity in the American experience. She will also critically assess the movements and directions of religion in America for the future.

2. **Respect for Self and Others:** On the one hand, America is unique in that the majority of its citizens claim to be some sort of Christian. On the other hand, it is the most religiously diverse of all other nations. If one wants to be both authentically Christian and authentically American, one must learn self-respect and recognition of the legitimacy of the other.

3. **Expanding Worldview:** Any contemporary interpretation of religion in America must squarely face the events of September 11, 2001. How can Christian theology impact America’s, and the world’s, response to that event.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
1. The student will learn how to read, think, write, and speak critically about theological and sociological analyses of contemporary American culture.
2. The student will be introduced to pertinent theological terminology and concepts.
3. The student will be able to reflect critically upon crucial questions facing America today.
4. The student will confront challenges to accepted “myths” by which Americans live.
5. The student will explore the significance of Christian theology for American individual and public life.

REQUARED TEXTS:


*In addition, the instructor will make reading assignments from texts on eReserve in Grace Library. Students will read from the following texts:*


COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Reading**: All assigned readings.
2. **Writing**: Two different writing assignments:
   a. **Weekly postings**: Each week, students will post a 50-100 word comment on the weekly suggestions. These will vary for each module. This will be
a graded assignment. The rubric will accompany the assignment on the weekly modules.

b. **Theological Reflection Papers:** Each student will write three theological reflection papers on topics assigned by the instructor. Each paper will be a minimum of 750 (that’s usually about 3 pages, double-spaced, 12 pt font) words in length and a maximum of 1000 words. This will be a graded assignment. The rubric will appear on a separate form.

3. **Examinations:** There will be two exams, a midterm and a final. In addition, each student will complete a very short quiz (usually 5 multiple choice questions). These quizzes will be ungraded but must be completed before the student can access the next module.

4. **Attendance and Class Participation:** This is an asynchronous online course. Students will demonstrate their “attendance” and “participation” by completing the weekly assignments. Although the course is asynchronous, there will be three times during the semester when all students will participate in a “chat room” by which we will enter into a discussion with one another concerning various course concepts. These will be graded discussions and two of the three will constitute a dialogical midterm and final.

5. **Alternative Writing Option:** In place of the three analytical reflection papers (2b above), the student may choose to write one 9-12 (2,250 -3,000 words) page research paper on a topic approved by the instructor. The topic must be something that has to do with Christianity and American Society. Students choosing this option must indicate such by Module (Week) Five. Further instructions will appear on a separate form.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** All written assignments are to be typed and double-spaced using a normal size font (12 pt. suggested). All written assignments are expected to display college level writing, including proper grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation. All assignments must include the student’s name, the course number (i.e., TH 167), the course section (i.e., DA), the assignment description (i.e., Reflection Paper, Prompt X; Midterm Exam, etc.), and the date the assignment is due.

**Student Evaluation:**

Ten Posts, five (5) points each for a total of 50 points.
Three Reflection papers at 50 points each for a total of 150 points.
Optional Research Paper, 150 points
Midterm and Final: 25 points each for a total of 50 points.

Total Course Points: 250 points. Approximate breakdown for letter grade equivalent:

“A”= 225-250
“B” =200-224
“C”=175-199
“D”=150-174
“F”=149 and below.

A”: Outstanding understanding of course and text concepts and appropriate and extensive use of them in papers. This means that student must actually quote the appropriate texts. Grammatical correctness in papers. Assignments turned in on time.

“B”: Very good understanding of course and text concepts and significant usage of them in papers. Grammatical correctness in papers.

“C”: Adequate understanding of course and text concepts. Grammar not perfect but does not interfere with expression of ideas.

“D”: Inadequate understanding of course and text concepts and either incorrect usage or lack of appropriate usage in papers. Grammatical errors interfere with communication of ideas. Missing more than three assignments.

“F”: Lack of understanding of course concepts in papers and exam. Extremely poor grammar. Missing more than four weekly postings. Failure to complete course requirements. Cheating on exams or plagiarism.

COURSE OUTLINE:

Week 1, Module 1—Jan. 9-13: Course Introduction.

This course is an exploration of the relationship between Christianity and the American experiment. In particular, we will look at the Calvinistic influences that was brought to the “new world” by the Puritans. Calvinism has played a part in every one of the “myths” explored by Richard Hughes in his text Myths America lives By. In our second text, Michael and Kenneth Himes bring a Catholic interpretation of essential Christian doctrine to bear on significant contemporary issues.

But before we move into those two parts of the course, we will do well to investigate the situation of American “individualism”. Robert Bellah suggests that the contemporary notion of American individualism is quite different from that described in the 1820’s by Alec de Tocqueville. De Tocqueville saw American society as a collection of individuals who had what he called “habits of the heart”—individuals whose individuality was enhanced by immersion in the lives of their neighbors.

View: Instructor video

Reading: Bellah, “A House Divided” (eReserve)
First Posting (Ungraded): Each student should post an introduction of themselves. Include the following:
1. Name (first name only)
2. Program of Study (your major)
3. Year in school (sophomore, junior, senior?)
4. What do you hope to get from this course, specifically as a theology course?
5. Provide a quote from the Bellah text that you found significant or interesting.

Ungraded (but required) Quiz: Complete the five point quiz in order to move to the next module.


We continue our study of Bellah’s article. He writes that an American core belief is that “economic success or misfortune is the individual’s responsibility, and his or hers alone. (viii) A page later, he writes: “Civic republicanism and biblical religion remind us that being an individual—being one’s own person—does not entail escaping our ties to others, and that real freedom lies not in rejecting our social nature but in fulfilling it in a critical and adult loyalty, as we acknowledge our common responsibility to contribute to the wider fellowship of life.” (pages ix-x)

In the second reading, by Richard Hughes in Myths America Lives By, the idea of the American Creed is introduced. In particular, he focuses on the stories and myths that Americans share, the stories that shape our lives. Hughes offers an accurate description of how the concept of myth is going to be used in his book. Myth, he writes, is a story that speaks of meaning and purpose, and for that reason it speaks truth to those who take it seriously.” He adds that “an American myth is a story that conveys commonly shared convictions on the purposes and meanings of the nation.” (p. 2)

View: Instructor Video

Reading: Hughes, Preface and Introduction.

Second Posting (Graded): Choose a quote from your reading of Hughes’ Introduction that you think is significant or that particularly strikes you as significant. Then write a 50 word comment on why you think it is significant.

RUBRIC FOR POSTING: Posting should be 50 words in length, not counting the quote you choose. The quote should actually be significant to the text itself. Write in full sentences with correct grammar and punctuation. Your comment should reflect an understanding of the quote in the context of the whole reading. The posting is worth 5 points.

Ungraded (but required) Quiz:

THE MYTH OF THE CHOSEN NATION: In this chapter, Hughes explains the origins of why Americans see the nation as one “chosen” by God. This myth has its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures (what Christians call the Old Testament). Ancient Israel experienced itself as “God’s chosen people” for the purpose of being a “light to the nations”. The Puritans brought a modified version of this concept to America. To be chosen implied a “covenantal” relationship with God that required a particularly strict moral way of life.

The brand of Christianity that the Puritans brought to America was shaped by John Calvin’s contributions to the Protestant Reformation. Much of Hughes’ writing in his book is devoted to expounding upon the impact of Calvinistic Protestantism on American culture and myths that America believes in.

Recall that in his Introduction, Hughes wrote that “those of us who view America as a good and compassionate nation are almost always people who have benefitted from its policies”. (1) Thus, he ends each of his chapters with an African American critique of the myth under consideration.

View: Instructor video; also Martin Luther and the Reformation, and Calvinism

Reading: Hughes, Chapter 1

Additional Assignment: Watch President Trump’s Inaugural address.

Third Posting: Presidential Watch: On January 20, President Trump took the oath of office and delivered his inaugural address. Traditionally, in America, the incoming president is watched closely in the first 100 days in office and it is often seen as a predictor of the remaining years of his presidency. Students should listen/watch the address and see if there is anything in the address that can resonate with the “myth of the chosen nation”. Make an explicit connection in a minimum of 50 words.

Ungraded Quiz


Often, when one listens to a conservative talk show host or an Evangelical Christian radio station, the opinion expressed is that America is a Christian nation. Hughes will deal with that opinion more specifically in Chapter 3. However, the present chapter on “Nature’s Nation” begins to approach that topic by introducing the reader to religious concept developed by an Englishman named Edward Lord Herbert in 1624. The concept is known as “Deism”. The very word implies “God” since it derives from the Latin deus, meaning “God”. But that is all that it has in common with traditional Christianity. The deist believes in God as a Supreme Being and Creator, but it is not the God of the Bible. For the deist, the only Bible we need is “nature”—nature teaches us everything we need
to know about God and about moral behavior. Thus, this is not the Trinitarian God of Christianity, nor the God whom we call the Father of Jesus Christ.

The founding Fathers of the American Republic, especially Jefferson and Franklin, were more “deist” in their religious outlook than they were Christian, even though both belonged to Protestant Christian churches, most likely an Episcopalian form of Christianity. In the “Jefferson Bible” Jesus is revered as a great moral teacher, but not as the divine Son of God (see pages 50-52 in Hughes). So phrases such as “one nation under God” and “in God we trust” are subject to suspicion as to what “God” the phrases refer.

**View:** Instructor’s video; also the Deism video.

**Read:** Hughes, chapter 2.

**Fourth Post: Presidential Watch:** Try to catch the national news a few times during the week, paying special attention to proposals put forth by President Trump and/or Congress. In particular, be attentive to any references to God or religion and make appropriate connection to chapter 2.

**Ungraded Quiz:**

**Week 5: Module 5—Feb. 6-10:** Is America a Christian Nations.

In this chapter, Hughes confronts the question about the Christian identity of America. Is America a Christian nation? Interestingly, Hughes chooses in this chapter to focus on what is referred to as the “Second Great Awakening”. Shortly after the birth of our nation, the majority of its citizens subscribed to a “Calvinist” interpretation of Christianity. The purpose of the Second Great Awakening, thus, was to “Protestantize” America. The goal was to create a “state religion”, a “theocracy” if you will (a theocracy is when the government, culture, legal system, etc. are one and the same. Several Moslem countries such as Arabia, are theocratic nations).

There was a so-called “humanitarian” dimension to the Second Great Awakening. Charles Finney convinced new converts that they must participate in a “transformation” of society. Prison reform, temperance, education and the abolition of slavery were among those transformations embraced. The American Bible Society and the American Education Society organized in 1816 with the intent of distributing Bibles and Protestant-oriented education. Both Catholics and Blacks were targeted because of the growing fear that they would eventually outweigh Protestant New England—thus, the attempt to Protestantize America. Proponents of the separation of church and state owe a debt of gratitude to the Anabaptists of the 16th century. They established a church apart from a church sanctioned by the state, thus becoming forerunners of the American church/state separation. However, as Hughes asserts, the separation of church and state does not mean a separation of church and culture.

**View:** Instructor’s video and Khan Academy: The Second Great Awakening
Reading: Hughes, Chapter 3


Posting: No posting due this week

Ungraded Quiz: Who is the present president of the U.S.


Millennialism implies the ushering in of a new age. In our context, it suggests “that the United States would illumine the globe with truth, justice, goodness, and democratic self-government and would thereby usher in a final golden age for all mankind.” (91) In theological language, this is an “eschatological” statement. Eschatology has to do with the “end times”. Many forms of Protestant Christianity assume that the Lord (Jesus) will return in a Second Coming and will rule over evil for a thousand years (millennium).

Connected with the sister myth of being the “chosen” nation, millennialists saw America as the new “promised land” that boasted of “truth and liberty” heretofore unseen in the western world. America represented a “new order for the ages” (novus ordo seclorum). The First Great Awakening provided the religious fuel for this new order. Further combined with the myth of “nature’s nation”, millennialism took America toward its “logical” destiny (Manifest Destiny) of being that light to all the other nations and peoples.

View: Instructor’s video; The Great Awakening; Millennialism.

Read: Hughes, chapter 4.

Fifth Posting: Presidential Watch: Particularly with connections to the themes of chapters 3 and 4.

Ungraded Quiz:


Chapter 5 in Hughes explores the mythical dimensions of American capitalism. In particular, he discusses the social ramifications of the vast accumulation of wealth in America as a result of industrialism in the northern states in particular in the post-civil era. The South, because of its two
By the 19th century reliance upon plantation slavery had never moved toward industrialization and was thus left rather bereft after the abolition of slavery.

He also introduces us the notion of “social Darwinism”. Darwin, as most know, was famous for popularizing the concept of “evolution” as a scientific explanation for why some species flourish and others became extinct. “Survival of the fittest” was a term never used by Darwin. He preferred the term “adaptation”. Species that could biologically adapt to their environment would survive.

It was the Englishman, Herbert Spencer, who took Darwin’s biological concepts and applied them to an explanation of the emergence of wealth in the western world. It was he who used the term “survival of the fittest” to explain why the “fittest survive”. In applying this to economics and politics, it was clear to him that a certain elite group were clearly the fittest and had the “divine” right to rule with the power to make decisions for those who were clearly not the fittest.

**View:** Instructor’s video; also “The gospel of wealth”; Darwinism vs. Social Darwinism; and “The Social Gospel”.

**Reading:** Hughes, chapter 5; Scott. “A Spirituality of Resistance” (eReserve)

**Sixth Posting:** Presidential Watch: Student postings should make connections between the Trump presidency and the concepts presented in these readings and videos.

**Ungraded Quiz:**

**Week 8: Module 8--Feb. 27-Mar. 3: The Perfect Nation?!**

In chapter 6, Hughes explores the “myth of the innocent nation”. Recall Hughes “Introduction” where he compares the “cynical” and “absolutist” perceptions of America. For the former, America never does anything right; for the latter, America is perfect. Hughes posits in this chapter that America is still a great nation—but not a totally innocent nation. The response to the attacks of 9/11 on the part of many Americans was one of incredulity—not simply because we were not prepared, but that we were not prepared that anyone could hate us that much. Mark Slouka concluded that the American reaction to 9/11 was that “this was not just a terrorist attack….this was an act of metaphysical trespass”. (158)

Perhaps this is an example of what theologian Reinhold Niebuhr meant when he wrote that there is “the ironic tendency of virtue to turn into vices when too complacently relied upon”. (158) This “paradox” implies a certain tendency to blindness when it comes to our own complicity in guilt. Our guilt lies precisely in our refusal to acknowledge that we can possibly be guilty of anything. “Everybody loves me, baby. What’s the matter with you?” sings Don Mclean (Miss American Pie fame). We just can’t understand why anyone would wish us harm. We’re convinced that the entire world wants a MacDonald fast food restaurant and a Disney World. We export our culture over the entire planet.
assuming that everyone wants to be us. Certainly, none of this justifies terrorism on any level. But it should make us pause and reflect on how the rest of the world perceives us.

**View:** Instructor’s video; also, “The Cross and the Lynching Tree”

**Reading:** Hughes, chapter 6 and Conclusion

**Posting:** Midterm Chatroom discussion: Each student will post the most salient point of their midterm essay in 50-100 words. After the student posts her/his point, he/she must respond to one of her/his classmates’ postings.

Mid-term Exam: Each student will submit an essay (250 word minimum, 500 maximum) on the following. View “the cross and the lynching tree” video. Then revisit the sections in all of Hughes’ chapters where he provides the “African-American” response to the respective myth. The essay should include remarks about what the African-American response to the myth of “chosen”. For example, what did “chosen” mean for the African-American experience? In all, the student should choose only THREE of the African-American responses (at the end of three different chapters and their respective myths) and elaborate on them in light of James Cone’s remarks about the “cross and the lynching tree”. The exam should be posted by Friday, 11:59 pm.

Ungraded Quiz:

---

**SPRING BREAK: MARCH 6-10**

**Week 9: Module 9—Mar. 13-17: Public Theology.**

We are now ready to enter into the third phase of this course. In a sense, Bellah’s writing on the state of “individualism” in America suggests that we have arrived at a point where individualism has become unhinged from the parameters of biblical religion and civic republicanism. Hughes’ book might be interpreted as an attempt to explain how we arrived at this point. The present text, *The Fullness of Grace: The Public Significance of Theology*, demonstrates how basic Christian theological doctrines might provide an alternative way of thinking in American society today.

In other words, where Bellah points to where we are, and Hughes tells us how we got here, the Himes brothers suggest a way forward. In this first chapter, the “privatization” of religion, along with a certain distortion of the understanding of the separation of church and state, has led to the notion that religion (specifically, Christianity for our purposes) should not have a voice in the public square, even if the reasons offered by that voice can benefit America. The concept of the “public church” is the brainchild of Protestant theologian Martin Marty. The public church is not a church of a particular denomination. By the time it morphs from public church to public theology to public philosophy it can then be defined as something which is
“available to all intelligent, reasonable, and responsible members of that culture despite their otherwise crucial differences in belief and practice”. (16)

Students should be aware that this text will be more challenging than the previous readings. Bellah’s writing reflected a social science methodology; Hughes’ book is largely historical. Most students have had some semblance of exposure to those approaches. However, theological thinking, terminology, key persons, and concepts will be a new adventure to most of you. The discipline of theology is not the same as catechism or Sunday school. It is not church or bible study or even a prayer group. Thus, in my experience, most students have had little or no exposure to theological writing and thinking. So, as a result, most students find this book to be a new challenge for them. I will expect even more questions about this text than the previous readings.

View: Instructor’s video; also Martin Martin on State of Religion

Read: Himes, chapter 1. Also download the prompts for Second Theological Reflection Paper, due Week 10.

Seventh Posting: Presidential Watch: Where so far in the Trump presidency can you see examples of a public church/theology in action, or where do you see instances that could benefit from a public church/theology?

Ungraded Quiz:


In chapter 2, the Himes brothers introduce the readers to Catholic Social Teaching (hereafter CST). Some have referred to this teaching as the best kept secret of Catholicism. It seems few people know about it, including committed Catholics. The video for this module will explain a few basic principles of this teaching. In short, it challenges the “liberal” (note this is not the same meaning as the political or doctrinal meaning of the word) concept of atomistic individualism (recall Bellah) and posits a more “communitarian” approach to society.

The doctrine of original sin is one shared by both Protestants and Catholics. The term itself was coined by St. Augustine in the 4th century. Following Augustine, Luther’s view of humanity is quite negative, believing that human beings are totally depraved as a result of original sin (Adam and Eve’s choice to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden). Catholic anthropology is not quite as negative. Catholicism acknowledges that we have been “wounded” as a result of the fall, but that we still
retain the *Imago Dei* (Image of God). Thus, for Catholicism, human beings retain their original goodness that precedes original sin and is not destroyed by sin.

The point this chapter is that original sin does not necessarily result in human selfishness. We are still capable of concern for others; we are still capable of authentic community; we are still capable of responding to God’s grace and of working for the common good of all.

**View:** Instructor’s video; also view Principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

**Reading:** Himes, chapter 2.

**Writing:** Second Theological Reflection Due (See Appendix 2 of syllabus for prompts) due by Friday, 11:59 pm.

**Posting:** No Posting required this week.

**Ungraded Quiz:**

---

**Week 11: Module 11—Mar. 27-31: Human Rights.** Read Himes, chapter 3. Ryan (eReserve);

**Questions Due on Himes (chapter 3) and Ryan.**

In this chapter, the Himes brothers investigate human rights in light of the doctrine of the Trinity, the Christian belief that God is one in three divine persons. In other words, God exists as relational community. The belief that we are created in the image and likeness of God implies that we are created as relational beings. As the Himes brothers put it, “relationship precedes existence”. That phrase requires some deep reflection. In other words, relationship defines how we are to exist. It is not an option for the Christian.

A related point of this chapter is the notion that creation occurs as a result of God’s self-gift. Creation is pure gift. Following that the Himes brothers suggest that the most fundamental human right is the “right to self-gift.” The role of civil government is to help create a society where we are free to self-gift. That is a very difficult concept for the poor who have to spend all of their energy just to survive.

This chapter also distinguishes between legal rights and moral rights. “A human right cannot be an unlimited claim. We do not have a moral right to everything and anything.” (64) Catholic Social Teaching posits that all claims to rights must always take into consideration the larger community. Rights do not exist in a vacuum. All rights are conditioned by our relationship to the larger community. Indeed, one of the most perplexing problems in society is that of balancing individual rights with communal responsibility.

**View:** Instructor video.
Reading: Himes, chapter 3.

Eighth Posting: Find an article on the Trump presidency in one of these three weekly journals: America, Commonweal, or Christian Century. (All three are in Grace Library and also accessible via eBSCOhost.
Post your comments about the article you read.

Ungraded Quiz:

Week 12: Module 12—Apr. 3-7: Morality and Life Issues.

This chapter introduces the student to the theological concept of grace and its related concepts of sin, freedom, and sacramentality. From a Catholic theological perspective, all of reality is “graced” reality. There is no such thing as a “remainder concept”—that is, a part of reality that is not “graced” reality. As graced beings, we humans are created in freedom. It is this freedom that makes not only holiness possible, but also sin. Freedom precedes sin; it is not a consequence of sin.

Likewise, the distinction that some make between the “sacred” and the “secular” is just that—a distinction, but never a separation. Again, all reality, including so-called secular reality, is graced.

Sin human experience a created freedom, then sin is possible. But we were not created to sin. We were created to “love God with our whole heart and soul; and to love our neighbor as ourselves.” But humans do, in fact, sin. And even if we think our sins don’t affect God, then we often see the harm we can do to other humans. And so, the idea of ethics is as old as humanity. “How shall we live?”, asks both the Himes brothers and Bellah. “How shall we treat one another”? is a question that follows.

Throughout the ages, we humans seem to have been rather inconsistent about ethics. Sometimes conservatives will fight to protect the unborn, but demand capital punishment. Sometimes liberals will decry the human consumption of animals but don’t have the same outrage at the killing of unborn humans. Obviously, many of us are not that polarized in our thinking. But all life issues seem to insist on a more consistent ethics across the board. Thus, Joseph Bernardin, a Catholic bishop and cardinal, urged a more consistent ethic of life for Americans.

View: Instructor’s video and the video on Cardinal Bernardin

Reading: Himes, chapter 4; also, Maura Ryan, “A Feminist Critique of Unlimited Reproductive Freedom” (eReserve)

Ninth Posting: Presidential Watch: Post one comment on an ethical dilemma in America that has occurred during this semester that either exemplifies a consistent ethic of life; or one that exemplifies an inconsistent ethic of life—Use Bernardin’s four qualities (p. 90).
Ungraded Quiz:

Week 13: Module 13—Apr. 10-14: Environmental Ethics

This will be an exciting unit for those of you with particular sensibilities concerning the earth and environmental issues. Again, the Himes brothers introduce one of the most fundamental of Christian doctrines, that of creation. While we can’t do justice to a discussion between science and religion here, I will point out that both Catholicism and mainline Protestantism embrace the scientific stories of the “big bang theory” and “evolution”. The Genesis creation stories communicate more the sacredness and giftedness of creation; the sciences attempt to communicate the “how” of creation as we have experienced it throughout nearly 14 billion years.

Theologically, nature is never just nature, but always retains its character as “creation”. As in the previous chapter, an environmental ethic is rooted in the concepts of grace, freedom, sin, and sacrament. Added to those is the theological conviction that all of reality is created reality, from the smallest organism to the highest mountains. That includes us humans. Our common reality is that we are creatures with all other creatures. None of us have created ourselves. This, according to the patron saint of the environment, St. Francis of Assisi, is the common poverty and unity that we humans share with all other creatures. Thus we exist in “companionship” with the cosmos and all creatures within it.

This is not simply a matter of being conservative or liberal, or of denying global warming or blaming the use of fossil fuels for making carbon footprints all over. Authentic theological environmental ethics transcends denying or blaming, as both the Himes brothers and Belden Lane (eReserve) assert. For the Himes brothers, it is a moral imperative for humans to use the resources of the earth with the notion that all is the gift of God’s creation. Thus, as Lane asserts, we are to delight in creation, meaning that we are to use creation “rightly”. Misuse of the gifts of creation is sinful.

Thus, the starting point for any theological environmental ethics begins with the experience of “delight”, not denial or blame. Along with that it requires a certain heightening of the senses in the experience of the beauty of created reality.

View: Instructor’s video; also the video on Ecotheology

Reading: Himes, chapter 5; also Belden C. Lane, “Jonathan Edwards on Beauty, Desire and the Sensory World” (eReserve). Also, review the prompts for the third theological reflection writing found in Appendix 3.
**Tenth Posting:** Have you ever lost a place or thing of beauty in nature? A young woman I knew grew up outside Pittsburgh in an apartment building. Her bedroom faced the street and every day of her 17 years of life she could look out of her window at the tree that had grown between the sidewalk and the street. It had always been there. One day she came home and found that the 1. and loved it being there and thought of it as being her tree. She mourned the loss of “her” tree. She used this tree and her experience of the loss of it in her essay when she applied for colleges and tremendously impressed the admissions departments.

Have you ever mourned the loss of something beautiful in nature—a meadow filled with wildflowers that became a strip mall? A park that was used for new housing or business offices? A beach that had to be closed down due to pollution? A favorite place in the country that had been developed? What is your place of beauty? Is it still there? Is it a place in which you delight?

**Ungraded Quiz:**

---

**EASTER BREAK: APRIL 13-17**

**Week 14: Module 14—Apr. 17-21: Incarnation, Patriotism and Nationalism.**

This is a controversial chapter for many, but it need not be. During the 1960’s and early 1970’s, the Vietnam War was so unpopular that it was actually popular to be unpatriotic. However, 9/11 ushered in a new wave of patriotism, not seen since World War II. Hitler and Pearl Harbor presented us with very explicit enemies. Today’s terrorism is not quite so easy to strike out against. Yes, we identify groups such as ISIS but it’s not like a particular country or nation we can target. Identifying everyone who “looks” like a Muslim terrorist is not only wrong, but rather ineffective as well.

So, what does it mean to be an American patriot? The Himes brothers suggest that we make a distinction between “patriotism” and “nationalism”. Patriotism is characterized by a shared love of our land, culture, history, etc., and will defend those things when attacked. It takes on a “defensive” posture. Nationalism, on the other hand, takes on an offensive posture. Nationalism assumes that one’s country is always right, even when it’s wrong. It assumes a superior position in the world that is afforded certain rights over others.

This distinction is rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. King David was told by God not to take a census. The reason was that Israel would begin to rely on their own strength and not on God. The religious danger is that of turning our country into an “idol”. Idolotry is not the worship of an actual “other” god. Rather, it occurs whenever we turn anything that is not God into a god, when we attribute divine status to that which is not divine. Nationalism is believing that our devotion to our country equals that of our devotion to the divine.
The Christian doctrine that is evoked for this chapter is the Incarnation. The Incarnation is what Christians celebrate at Christmas. It is the belief that God became flesh (in-carne) in Jesus of Nazareth. The “scandal of particularity” is the belief that God has revealed the divine self in totality in a particular person (Jesus) in a particular place (Israel) at a particular time (1st century a.d.). The Christian belief is that this has never occurred before or since in any particular person, place, or time. Thus, it appears as rather audacious and scandalous to non-Christians.

But the practical dimension of this belief is that we experience the divine and human life in particular space and time, and that we experience bodily. Thus, Christians believe that the world we live in (country, state, town) with other actual people (family, friends, neighbors, citizens) is not negligible. Thus, we experience a sense of “loyalty” to actual places and times and people. So, we root for the Steelers, Pirates, and Penguins in Pittsburgh. We love its rivers, bridges, and hills. We become loyal to the land and its people. That is what we mean by patriotism. Thus, the connection between the incarnation and patriotism.

View: Instructor’s video

Reading: Himes, chapter 6.

Eleventh Posting: Presidential Watch: Where and when do we see “loyalty” (patriotism) versus nationalism (idolatry)?

Ungraded Quiz:

Week 15—Apr. 24-28: Saints, Tradition, Solidarity. Read Himes, Chapter 7; Epilogue. Third Reflection Paper due Weds.

In the previous chapter, the notion of patriotism suggests that it is good for us to experience a particular loyalty and affection for our family, friends, and country’s citizenry. The last chapter in this text suggests that we are also required to love beyond our borders, beyond our “own kind”. The doctrine of the “communion of saints” implies that we also have a responsibility to those beyond those we know here and now and beyond those with whom we share a common national history.

Recall that in the Hughes text, the myths of “nature’s nation” and of the “millennial nation” suggested that America had no pre-history. It represented a new era, without the historical baggage of Western Europe. The present chapter warns against a loyalty and devotion only to the present age, and only to one’s own country. Citing Abraham Lincoln, they write that “profound obligations and duties link the living with the dead and the unborn.” We have duties to those who have gone before us and to those who will come after us.

But Christianity also requires us to join in solidarity with those who suffer throughout the world, regardless of their national origin, their race, or their religion. The doctrine of the
Communion of Saints suggests that all human beings are children of God and thus deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.

View: Instructor’s video and “Roses in December” in its entirety. Read Prompts for Final Exam. See Appendix 4.

Posting: Post third theological reflection paper

No Quiz this week

Final Exam: Final Post on Prompt to follow

SPECIAL MESSAGES:

1. Core Curriculum LAI/TH or Compass BREADTH Course: This course satisfies the LAI in TH and a Compass Breadth Course in Wisdom. The emphasis in theology is on Inquiry (the I in LAI, and the Impetus of Wisdom). It is through Inquiry, or questioning that we search for truth, for wisdom. Nothing is given. The classic definition of theology is fides quarens intellectum, that is, faith seeking understanding. The Latin word “quarens” is linked to the English “quest” and “question.” Any good question is an attempt to understand or to approach what is true and authentic about human experience as well as the Sacred or God. In this quest wisdom may be found. Wisdom, according to Thomas Aquinas, is to seek the truth with love. Questioning in Catholic theology is a good practice, and students are encouraged to ask questions in class and to raise deep, pertinent questions in their papers. If a student is hesitant to ask a question in her/his posting, this can be done via email to the instructor. I will respond to the question in a post (time permitting and the relevance of the question to course concerns) and the student will remain anonymous.

2. The instructor reserves the right to minimally adjust the syllabus as the progress of the course indicates.

3. Late THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION PAPERS will be accepted for reasons approved by the instructor. Papers not received within one week still must be turned in, but cannot receive full credit. However, assignments not turned in at all will be interpreted as not having completed the course.

   For legitimate reasons and with the instructor’s prior permission weekly assignments will be accepted up to 48 hours after original due time. Otherwise, missed assignments will receive zero (0) points for the appropriate week.

4. Life Happens: Please contact the instructor right away if you are experiencing life difficulties that threaten your success in this course. More often than not, we professors
can be helpful. Some students refrain from contacting the professor because of embarrassment or fear. I have been teaching here for 27 years. There’s not much you can tell me that I haven’t heard in one version or another. Don’t let your embarrassment or fear keep you from asking for help.

**CARLOW UNIVERSITY DISABILITY STATEMENT**

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY**

Carlow University makes every effort to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. This includes individuals with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and mental health disorders who meet the definition of disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students with disabilities have the same responsibility as other students to meet the University's academic, technical, and behavioral standards and to follow the University's general policies and guidelines regarding standards of conduct. Students who plan to request accommodations should contact the Disabilities Services Office at the beginning of each semester since accommodations cannot be granted retroactively. To determine whether you qualify for accommodations, or if you have questions about services and procedures for students with disabilities contact:

Jacqueline M. Smith
Disabilities Services Office
University Commons, 4th floor
Phone - 412.578.6257 (Office line)
        412.578.6050 (Direct line)
Fax - 412 578.2027
dso@carlow.edu

**CARLOW UNIVERSITY TEMPORARY DISABILITY POLICY**

Carlow University values each student and is invested in encouraging his or her academic success in line with the Mercy mission “to respond reverently to God”
and others; and to embrace an ethic of service for a just and merciful world.” In keeping with the mission, the University has chosen to offer assistance to those with temporary conditions such as short term illnesses, injuries, or other temporary medical conditions. While the University is not required to provide such support under the Americans with Disabilities Act, some assistance may be arranged via the Disability Services Office (DSO). Each situation will be reviewed; however, the office cannot guarantee that services will be provided.

In order to determine if a student with a temporary condition may receive some assistance via the DSO, he/she should contact the office at 412 578-6257. The student will be asked to meet with Jackie Smith, Disabilities Services Representative, and to provide the requisite documentation of his/her condition. Mrs. Smith will review the documentation and may consult with the student accommodation committee to determine what, if any, assistance may be provided. All documentation will remain confidential.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Carlow University aims to educate and challenge students to reach their highest potential by guiding students along a path of honesty and integrity throughout their intellectual pursuits. Students are thus expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Forms of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to):

- Cheating—providing or receiving inappropriate assistance on any coursework.
- Plagiarism—submitting another’s work as one’s own; not properly citing sources, using exact wording without quotations or proper attribution, paraphrasing without proper citation, or improper paraphrasing; attributing citations to inaccurate or misleading sources.
- Self-plagiarism—unauthorized use of one’s own work or part of a work, either from the same course or from another course, in more than one assignment.
- Academic deceit—use of false or altered information or withholding information critical to the processes of the University; providing false information or documentation with the intent to obtain an exemption, extension or exception to one’s coursework; signing other students into classes or on group reports.
- Fabrication of data—using falsified or fabricated data, forgery, or unsanctioned documents for research or other coursework.
- Interference with other students’ learning or achievement—sabotaging (including failing to contribute to) group projects or laboratory work, disrupting in-class work, altering computer files or online posts, or making educational materials unavailable to others.
- Unauthorized acquisition or exchange of coursework—purchasing, borrowing, stealing, or otherwise obtaining material with the intent to use as one’s own
coursework; selling, lending, or otherwise offering one’s own coursework to others with the intent of allowing the recipient to use the work as one’s own; obtaining a copy of one’s own completed tests and exams (either a physical copy, an electronic image, or a screenshot) without explicit permission from the course instructor.

All violations of Carlow’s academic integrity policy will be kept on permanent record. Serious or multiple violations will be forwarded to the Academic Integrity Council for a judicial hearing. It is the student’s responsibility to become familiarized with Carlow’s Academic Integrity Policy. The full policy can be found in the Course Catalog.

**ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

The Center for Academic Achievement (CAA), 4th floor University Commons, is a valuable resource for Carlow students and offers free in-person tutoring for writing, course content, computer skills and study strategies. The CAA is open weekdays and with limited hours on weekends. Make an appointment at [https://carlow.mywconline.com](https://carlow.mywconline.com) from your computer, smart phone or tablet, click the FIND A TUTOR button on MyPortal, or call 412-578-6146. Appointments must be made at least 48 hours in advance; one paper per appointment. Cancellations can be made online within 8 hours of the appointment time. For last minute cancellations, please call. See “CAA Resources” on Blackboard for guides on college survival skills, reading, learning strategies, math, and writing/research. Remember: the purpose of tutoring is to enhance independent learning, so tutors do not “edit” your papers or do your homework for you. Students are active participants in the tutoring experience.

**Appendix 1**

**TH 167 DA Christianity & American Society**

**First Theological Reflection Assignment**

Dr. Alverson  

Spring, 2017

Each student will write a 3-4 page, double-spaced theological reflection on ONE of the following prompts. The paper is due on Week 5.

**Option 1: Individualism:** Reread Bellah (eReserve). Bellah writes that “individualism, the first language in which Americans tend to think about their lives, values independence and self-reliance above all else.” This individualism is expressed in both a “hard utilitarian shape and a soft expressive form. One focused on the bottom line, the other on feelings...” Originally, individualism has been considered “sustainable over time in the United States because it has been supported and checked by other, more generous understandings”, i.e., biblical tradition and civic republicanism.

*For this paper, based on Bellah’s text, the student will reflect on the meaning of individualism in America today. What does it mean? What should it mean? What MUST it mean in order for us to not only survive but thrive as a society, as a nation? (NOTE: The student is not to write about what it personally means for her or him to be an individual. Rather, the student is to reflect on the concept of individualism itself and what it can or must mean today.)*

**Option 2: The American Creed:** In the Introduction to his book, Richard Hughes writes that “those of us who view America as a good and compassionate nation are almost always people who have benefitted from its policies.”
For this option, the student, with the help of the text, will reflect on their own family or community experience of the American Creed. Has our family or community benefitted or suffered as American citizens? Have we taken the “cynical” response or the “absolutist” one—or a mixture of the two? In terms of the “myths” we live by, which American story best reflects who we are as American citizens?

**Option 3: Chosen for What?:** The myth that America is a “chosen” nation (chapter one in Hughes) is not a wrong or bad myth. But it has moved a long way from John Winthrop’s idea that God’s covenant with the Puritans “had little to do with special privilege and everything to do with responsibilities for one another” to Albert Beveridge’s (1899) notion that God has chosen us as “master organizers of the world…”

For this option, the student, with the help of the text, will write reflectively on what it means to be chosen in the 21st century—chosen for what? To what is God calling America? How do we respond? Who is responsible for responding?—Obama? Congress? Our pastors? The general population? Our schools?

**INSTRUCTIONAL NOTE:** A reflection paper is not a research paper nor a position paper. There is nothing to prove, nothing to research. All the student needs are the course texts and reflective imagination. Start with the text. Quote the text and then reflect ON the issue FROM the text. If the student uses the text well, appropriately and often, the paper will be rather easy to write. The paper should not “know” too much, but try to “discover” much in the actual process of writing.

**STUDENT OPTIONAL WRITING:**

Instead of writing the three smaller, 3-4 page reflection papers, students may choose to write one larger research style paper (9-12 pages of text) to be turned in on the last day of class. Students may choose any topic relevant to course concerns (Christianity & American Society). However, the topic must be approved by the professor.

**Students who choose this option must turn in a typed, brief summary of their topic on Week Five.** Here are a few suggested topics:

1. Think of your own denominational church (Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian, non-denominational, etc.). There are several possibilities here:
   a. History of your denomination in America
   b. What does your church teach about life issues—war, capital punishment, abortion, assisted suicide, etc.?
   c. How does your church relate or connect to other religions—Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.?
   d. What are the critical issues your church comments on concerning the upcoming presidential election?
   e. What does your church think about climate change and ecological issues in general? What does it teach about immigration reform/policies in America?

2. What do young people in America think about organized religion? What importance does it hold for them? Do they perceive it as a vital resource for them to turn to in time of need?

3. What does it mean for your generation to be American citizens? What hopes do you have about the future of America? What concerns do you have as you imagine your future in the work force, raising families, being personally fulfilled in your work and in your role as citizens.

---

**Appendix 2**

**TH 167 Christianity and American Society**

**Second Reflection Paper Assignment**

Dr. Alverson
Each student will write a 3-4 page theological reflection paper on ONE of the following suggestions. The papers are due on Week Ten (10).

Option 1: In “A Spirituality of Resistance for Marriage,” (eReserve) Kieran Scott quotes Vaclav Havel’s (President of the Czech Republic) comments about the spiritual renewal among young people. According to Havel, “this is not an accidental phenomenon. It is an in evitable one: the endless, unchanging wasteland of the herd life in a consumer society, it’s intellectual and spiritual vacuity, its moral sterility, necessarily causes young people to turn their attentions somewhere further and higher; it compels them to ask questions about the meaning of life. . . .to seek, among the diffuse and fragmented world of frenzied consumerism for a point that will hold firm. . . “ (399) However, because this generation has become so separated from the traditions of the world’s great religions, they don’t quite know how to function in this attraction to spirituality. Scott, relying on Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, suggests that we need to return to the three deep springs of traditional religion. They are: silence, listening, and Sabbath.

For this paper, the student will spend significant time (the minimum of a morning, afternoon, or evening; or a whole day if possible), in total silence and solitude (no ipods, cell phones, TV or any other device). If possible the student should also fast from food and drink (Health permitting only!). During this time, the student will reflect upon herself in a consumerist and technological society. By using Scott’s text, the student will reflect upon what she experiences in silence, listening, and Sabbath and how this “spirituality of resistance” can be a present day challenge to the Gospel of Wealth.

Option 2: In Chapter 1 of Fullness of Faith, the Himes brothers discuss the concepts of a “Public Church and a Public Theology”. Essentially, these concepts may envision what “freedom of religion” is really all about. It respects the autonomy of the secular authorities, but also acknowledges that religious people are also part of the public square. As the Himes brothers cite, “In this sense ‘public’ has come to mean ‘the citizenry who reflect on matters of common concern, engage in deliberation together, and choose their representatives to constitute the government, whose powers are limited by a constitution. Religious bodies are very much part of this meaning of the public.” (p. 19)

However, a modern interpretation of the concept of the separation of church and state has often meant that even religious ideas and practices that are beneficial to common concerns shall remain only in the private, not the public, realm.

For this option, the student will use the Himes’ text, Fullness of Faith to reflect upon how a “public church and public theology” can benefit all Americans without intending or needing to convert. In particular, the student may consider the upcoming presidential election. To this end as well, the student may want to consult the several articles on the election as found in America, Commonweal, and Christian Century.

Option 3: In Fullness of Faith, chapter 2, “Original Sin and the Myth of Self-interest,” the Himes brothers discuss “liberal individualism” and its problems. They suggest a rather communitarian or common good approach to society. On page 36, they also
suggest five significant ways that “liberalism” has failed. However, Catholic theologians have long thought that there was an affinity between Catholic social thought and “liberal democracy”, even while it finds that the “social philosophy underlying . . . Anglo-American politics remains problematic”. That problem, of course, is the atomistic “individualism” and the “myth of self-interest” to which Bellah and the Himes brothers have referred.

For this paper, the student shall re-read chapter 2, “Original Sin and the Myth of Self-Interest. She should note in particular the “principles of Catholic Social Theory”; how the “Common Good” is understood; the difference between the common good and “public order”—the topics of “freedom, equality, and participation are all related to the experience of human dignity.” On page 46, the chapter begins a list of seven areas of American life that is affected by Catholic Social Theory.

For this paper, the student will choose one of the seven, two at the most, and examine them in light of Catholic Social Theory. For example, number 6 is “import of public life and leadership”. People have been quite critical of our process for nominating candidates for the office of the presidency. Does our process attract the best and brightest of candidates? Or consider number 1, “community rights”. As Cat Stevens once sang, “where do the children play?” Where is the community “space” to gather and chat? The point of this paper, though, is not to criticize. Rather, it is to see what Catholic Social Theory can bring to American life.

For Students Writing the Research Papers

Students writing the longer research papers due at the end of the term are expected to provide a typed working outline and bibliography (working here means “in progress”, not necessarily complete). This project is also due on Week Ten.