

Black Theology (Rel 431)
Benedict College
Columbia, South Carolina
Fall 2010

Instructor: Dr. Harry Singleton

Office Location: HRC 101; **Office Phone:** (705).4689

Office Hours: M-W 12pm-2pm; T-Th, 12pm-1pm, 2pm-4pm or by appointment

Email: singletonh@benedict.edu

Course Description

This course chronicles the origin and development of one of the most controversial theological movements of the twentieth century. It will begin with a general survey of both the informal and formal development of Black Theology before moving to the theologian considered the father of this theological school of thought, James H. Cone, and a thorough reading of his *A Black Theology of Liberation* in particular. More specifically, Cone's background, theological commitments and treatment of chosen doctrines of Christian faith will be explored for the purpose of exposing the student to the reasons as to why the emergence of Black Theology was/is a watershed event in the history of the American theological enterprise and why it represents such a different way of doing theology in the academy. The course concludes with internal critiques of Cone's theology, namely the theological critique of James Deotis Roberts, the womanist critique of Jacquelyn Grant and the theodicy critique of William Jones. The central theme of socio-political liberation for oppressed peoples as a faithful interpretation of the gospel will be emphasized for the purpose of exposing the student to a more liberating way of understanding Christian faith thereby insuring its relevance for oppressed communities in general and the black community in particular.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- 1) have a working knowledge of the informal and formal development of Black Theology;
- 2) identify the major presuppositions and thinkers of Black Theology;
- 3) have a thorough grounding in James Cone's theological commitments;
- 4) articulate the most prominent internal critiques of Black Theology.

Course Requirements

Four Papers (25% each); Weekly Reflection Papers (25%); lowest score dropped

Papers

A paper of three to five pages is required of each student for each of the phases listed below. The topic of the paper is to be decided in consult between the instructor and the student but, in some instances, will likely be determined directly by the instructor. All papers must be typed (font size 12), and double-spaced with one-inch margins a cover page and supporting documentation. Papers will be graded on spelling, grammar, documentation, **clarity of comprehension**, and aesthetic quality. **Papers will be**

accepted late only in rare circumstances to be determined by the instructor. Failure to turn in papers on time could result in a failing grade for the course. In addition, one page weekly reflection papers will be required as well. The topic of reflection papers is to be decided by either the instructor or in consort with the students.

Grade Scale

A 100-90

B 89-80

C 79-70

D 69-60

F 59-below

Cheating

It is hoped that the student would conduct his/her research independently and that the student's work is an original construction. Duplicating someone else's work will result in a failing grade for the course. These measures will be taken in addition to whatever action(s) Benedict College deems appropriate.

Attendance

Students will be allowed three unexcused absences. After the third unexcused absence, a point will be deducted from the student's final average for each subsequent absence!

Students are expected to attend classes regularly, to fulfill reading and writing assignments and to participate in class discussion. Failure to do so will not provide the student with enough quality class time to do solid jobs on his/her papers. Thus, frequent attendance is crucial for satisfactory performance!

Electronic Devices

Other than a laptop or recording device for lectures, electronic devices are strictly prohibited in the classroom. **In particular, cell phones and listening devices are prohibited from use during class!** They are to be turned off before entering the classroom and not used for the duration of the class. Students in violation will be disciplined or dismissed from the class.

Required Course Texts

Dwight N. Hopkins, Introducing Black Theology of Liberation. New York: Orbis Books, 1999.

James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (Twentieth Anniversary Edition). New York: Orbis Books, 1990.

Course Outline

Phase I - The Origin and Development of Black Theology

| <u>Week(s)</u> | <u>Reading(s)</u> | <u>Topic(s)</u> |
|----------------|-------------------|--|
| 1 | None | Course Introduction Course Syllabus |

| <u>Week(s)</u> | <u>Reading(s)</u> | <u>Topic(s)</u> |
|----------------|-------------------|--|
| 2 | Hopkins, Intro. | Lecture: Informal Dev. of BT |
| 3 | Hopkins, Ch. 1 | The Formation of a “Radical” Black Clergy |
| 4 | Handouts | Lecture: Formal Dev. of Black Theology |

PAPER ONE DUE

Monday, September 6 - Labor Day (No Classes)

Phase II - James Hal Cone: The “Father” of Black Theology

| <u>Week(s)</u> | <u>Reading(s)</u> | <u>Topic(s)</u> |
|----------------|-----------------------|--|
| 5 | Hopkins, Ch. 2 | Lecture: James Cone - Upbringing and Development |
| 6 | Cone, Prefaces, Ch. 1 | The Content of Theology |
| 7 | Cone, Chs. 2-4 | Sources of Black Theology Revelation and God |

Friday, September 24 - Faculty Development Day (No Classes)

| | | |
|---|-------------|---------------------------|
| 8 | Cone, Ch. 5 | Theology and Anthropology |
|---|-------------|---------------------------|

Thursday-Thursday, October 7-14 Midterm Examination Week

PAPER TWO DUE

**9 Monday-Thursday, October 18-21, Fall Break, Faculty Development Day
(No Classes)**

Phase III - The Theology of Cone continued

| <u>Week(s)</u> | <u>Reading(s)</u> | <u>Topic(s)</u> |
|----------------|---|--|
| 10 | Cone, Ch. 6 | Liberation Christology |
| 11 | Cone, Ch. 7 | Ecclesiology/Eschatology |
| 12 | <i>A Black Theology of Liberation</i> Review and Wrap-Up | Cone’s Theological Method/Presuppositions |

PAPER THREE DUE

AAR Annual Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia October 30-November 2

Phase IV - From Creation to Critique: The Big Three Weigh In!

| <u>Week(s)</u> | <u>Reading(s)</u> | <u>Topic(s)</u> |
|----------------|-------------------|--|
| 13 | Handout | J. Deotis Roberts: Liberation and Reconciliation |

| <u>Week(s)</u> | <u>Reading(s)</u> | <u>Topic(s)</u> |
|---|-------------------|--|
| 14 | Handout | Jacquelyn Grant: Is God A Sexist? |
| 15 | Handout | William Jones: Is God A White Racist? |
| Wednesday-Friday, November 24-26 - Thanksgiving (No Classes) | | |
| 16 | None | Course Wrap-Up PAPER FOUR DUE |

*****Senior Examinations***** Monday, November 29-Wednesday, December 1

*****Common Final Examinations***** Friday, December 3 and Saturday, December 4
8am-6pm

*****Final Examinations***** Monday, December 6 - Friday, December 10

*****Mid-Year Commencement Convocation***** Saturday, December 11

Although this is the stated outline, it is subject to change as dictated by either time availability or unforeseen circumstances.