

COS 522
Theology in the Contemporary Church
Teachers: Professor Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki and Classmates

The purpose of the course is to introduce local pastors to major theological trends, primarily from the 20th century, that continue to influence the contemporary United Methodist churches. Based on this course, and the four preceding it in the COS program, students will be expected to think more deeply into their own developing theologies, and how their theologies affect their practice of ministry.

Because class time is very condensed, I ask each student to work with the texts from January through June, culminating in our time together.

January 2016: John Wesley in and for the contemporary UMC

1. Imagine you actually had a meeting with John Wesley. What question would you like to ask him?
2. How do you think he would answer you?
3. Read *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. Notice that the meaning of "Christian Perfection" for Wesley is love. Pay particular attention to Wesley's "advices." How might General Conference be different if all UMCs took these advices seriously?
4. Does Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection have any influence on your church?

February 2016: Liberation Theology in and for the contemporary UMC

1. Go to the internet. Google the name of Walter Rauschenbusch. He was a pastor who served in "Hell's Kitchen," the popular name given to the skid row of New York City early in the 20th century. In many ways, he is the "father" of later theological movements that were called "liberation" theologies
2. Imagine you were living at the same time, and met Rauschenbusch. What question would you like to ask him?
3. How do you think he would answer you? Share your question and answer with classmates and professor through the group email.
4. Read *A Theology for the Social Gospel* this month. Does your reading change your question/answer? Share.
5. Do you see any influence from Rauschenbusch's theology in churches you have known?

March 2016: Existentialist Theology in and for the contemporary UMC

1. Go to the internet. Google the name of Paul Tillich and read the biographical pieces. He was a Lutheran pastor living in Germany at the beginning of the Nazi era. He had the honor of being one of the first persons evicted from Germany by Adolf Hitler, who did not like his ideas. Tillich emigrated to America and taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. His writings were known as "existentialist theology."
2. Imagine you were living at the same time as Tillich. What question would you like to ask him?
3. How do you think he would answer you? Share your question and answer through group email.

4. Read *The Dynamics of Faith*, during this month. Why is doubt an important part of faith for Tillich? Do you see any influence of this theology in churches you have known?

April 2016: Evangelical Theology in and for the contemporary UMC

1. Google the name of John R. W. Stott and read about this pastor in the Church of England. He was very influential in the twentieth century evangelical movement.
2. Imagine you had been able to meet this man. What would you have asked him?
3. How do you suppose he would have answered you?
4. Read *Basic Christianity*. Now how do you think he would answer you?
5. What influences from evangelical theology do you see in the churches you have known?

May 2016: Liberal Theology in and for the contemporary UMC

1. “Evangelical theology” such as you read in John Stott is often contrasted with “liberal theology,” and process is a form of liberal theology. Google “process theology” on the internet. Because I am a process theologian, you do not have to imagine meeting one! After reading the internet article, are there any questions you might like to ask me?
2. How do you think I’d answer?
3. Read *God Christ Church*. What are the basic similarities and differences between evangelical and liberal theology? Can both exist in the same church? Can you see any liberal influences in churches you have known?

June 2016: Review (or catch up on!) your reading! Come to class!