

# SYLLABUS



**TAYLOR**  
SEMINARY

*To develop Christ-minded leaders who make a difference in the world.*

## TH 544 What's Your God Story?

### Autobiography as Theology

Winter 2018

**INSTRUCTOR:** Randal Rauser, Ph.D  
Phone: 780-431-4428  
Email: [randal.rauser@taylor-edu.ca](mailto:randal.rauser@taylor-edu.ca)

**SCHEDULE:** Tuesday: 6:30 pm - 9:30 pm

**CREDITS:** 3

**PREREQUISITE:** TH 531

**PREREQUISITE/COREQUISITE:** TH 532

**DESCRIPTION:** What is your God story? How has your understanding of God developed and changed over the years? And how has that experience shaped your understanding of Christian doctrine? In this course, we turn our attention to the critical role of narrative and specifically autobiographical narrative, in shaping our understanding of theology. Through the course, we will learn to share our own stories by listening to the stories of others.

### TARGET STATEMENTS:

Upon completion of this course,

Knowledge: Students will

- **Understand** the way doctrinal articulation is shaped by experience, context, and personal narrative.
- **Understand** several distinct theologies and how they were formed and informed by particular personal experiences and social circumstances.

Ability: Students will

- **Develop** your own theological autobiography (i.e. the story of what your doctrinal beliefs are and how you came to hold them).
- **Be able** to share your story with others

Character: Students will

- **Be formed** with theological wisdom, humility, and charity in understanding one's own theological story and engaging with those of others.

### **TEXTBOOK(S):**

Augustine, *Confessions*. Henry Chadwick, trans. Oxford, 2009.

Cone, James. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Orbis, 2011.

Harris, Joshua. *Dug Down Deep: Building Your Life on Truths that Last*. Multnomah, 2011.

McClendon, Jr., James Wm. *Biography as Theology: How Life's Stories can Remake Today's Theology*. Wipf and Stock, 2002.

Rausser, Randal. *What's So Confusing About Grace?* Two Cup Press, 2017.

[Available for purchase from Dr. Rausser for \$20.]

### **ESSAY:**

Henking, Susan E. "The Personal is the Theological: Autobiographical Acts in Contemporary Feminist Theology," 59, no. 3 (1991), 511-25.

### **REQUIREMENTS:**

#### **1. Seminar Participation**

This course is in a seminar format, and as such it contrasts to a lecture-based course insofar as it focuses primarily on guided discussion of assigned readings and student presentations.

Consequently, it is imperative that students read assigned texts in advance, arrive on time, and are active participants in class discussion.

#### **2. Course Readings (1100 pp.)**

**45 hours**

Assigned readings should be completed before each class to ensure informed and meaningful engagement in class discussions.

#### **3. Book Reviews (5×10%=50%)**

**28 hours**

The class is focused on the discussion of five books, and consequently, the reviews of those books are critically important. Each review should be no shorter than 1000 words and no longer than 2000 words and should focus primarily on engaging the theological perspectives of the author as they emerge through his/her narrative or analysis.

As you write your reviews, ask yourself how the particularity of the author's experience in time and place shaped their understanding of Christian doctrine and practice.

<b><u>Book:</u></b>	<b><u>Due Date:</u></b>
McClendon, Jr, <i>Biography as Theology</i>	Feb. 5
Augustine, <i>Confessions</i>	Feb. 19
Cone, <i>The Cross and the Lynching Tree</i>	Mar. 5
Rausser, <i>What's So Confusing About Grace?</i> ,	Mar. 19
Harris, <i>Dug Down Deep</i> ,	Apr. 9
(1000-2000 words × 5 = 5000-10,000 words )	

#### **4. Theological Autobiography Paper 16 hours**

This paper is intended to provide a theological autobiography of the student's doctrinal development. What's your God story? In particular, what are your major beliefs and how did they develop over time? What were the catalysts for you developing your own beliefs about who God is and how we relate to him?

Keep in mind that this is not a systematic theology. As a result, feel free to focus on particular themes and/or doctrines that developed over time which were particularly significant for you. Do not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of all your beliefs. Where relevant, describe the pivotal circumstances and life events that contributed to the shaping of your beliefs.

(3000-3500 words)

**Due Date: Apr. 9 or 16**

#### **5. Theological Autobiography Seminar 1 hour**

Read your theological autobiography in the seminar (approximately 30 minutes) and then field questions from fellow students (approximately 15 minutes).

**Due Date: Apr. 9 or 16**

**HOW TO SUBMIT AN ASSIGNMENT:** Assignments should be emailed to [randal.rauser@taylor-edu.ca](mailto:randal.rauser@taylor-edu.ca) before midnight on the day they are due to ensure you do not receive a late penalty. Do not submit a hard copy. When you email your assignment it is recommended that you request a read receipt to ensure that your assignment has been received. *You are responsible to ensure that the assignment is received.*

**LATE PENALTIES AND PROCEDURES:** Assignments must be emailed before 11:59 pm on the day they are due in order to avoid a late penalty. Assignments automatically receive a 5% penalty for every day that they are late. Assignments late more than one week will receive 0%. (Weekends count as one day.) Extensions will not be granted **except in the case of a documented personal or medical crisis.**

<b>EVALUATION:</b> Class participation	15%
Book Reviews (5×10%)	50%
Theological Autobiography Paper	25%
Theological Autobiography Seminar	10%

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

Given that this class depends critically on student participation, *more than three unexcused absences will result in failure of the course.*

**COURSE OVERVIEW:**

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS
Jan. 22	Where does theology come from?	None
Jan. 29	An Introduction to Narrative Theology and Theological Biography	<i>Biography as Theology</i>
Feb. 5		<i>Biography as Theology</i> “The Personal is the Theological”
Feb. 12	Augustine	<i>Confessions</i>
Feb. 19	Augustine	<i>Confessions</i>
Feb. 26	Cone	<i>The Cross and the Lynching Tree</i>
Mar. 5	Cone	<i>The Cross and the Lynching Tree</i>
Mar. 12	Rausser	<i>What’s So Confusing About Grace?</i>
Mar 19	Rausser	<i>What’s So Confusing About Grace?</i>
Mar. 26	<i>Reading Week</i>	
Apr. 2	Harris	<i>Dug Down Deep</i>

<b>Apr. 9</b>	Harris Sharing your story	<i>Dug Down Deep</i> Class presentations
<b>Apr. 16</b>	Sharing your story	Class presentations

## GENERAL INFORMATION:

### 1. MOODLE

Taylor Seminary's Moodle is located on a shared platform with our partner seminary, Sioux Falls Seminary. Bookmark this site on your computer for easy, regular access:

<https://moodle.sfseminary.edu>

Moodle log-in is the first initial of your first name and your last name - all in lowercase, with no spaces. For example, if your name is John Calvin, you would log-in as jcalvin

The default enrolment key is the course code (all in lowercase, with no spaces). The course code consists of the course prefix followed by the course number.

For example, Old Testament Introduction's key is: ot417

If you are having trouble logging into Moodle or self-enrolling, please email

[teresa.seibel@taylor-edu.ca](mailto:teresa.seibel@taylor-edu.ca)

### 2. COURSE WRITING

#### *Formatting*

All studies and papers should be typed and formatted according to the Society of Biblical Literature writing style as outlined in the Seminary's *Guidelines for Research Writing in Religion & Theology (SBL)*. For the full stylesheet, please refer to Patrick H. Alexander, et al., ed., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014) which is in Reading Room.

#### *Research Language.*

You should employ acceptable research language for your paper which is not too informal yet reads inclusively. Avoid the use of gender specific language (e.g., Do not refer to "man" generically or to "mankind," "men," "he"; rather use "humankind," "humanity," "person," etc.)

#### *Plagiarism.*

Academic honesty and integrity is essential to the academic enterprise and the Seminary community. All written work submitted *must* be your own. *Guidelines for Research Writing* defines plagiarism as the failure to give credit where credit is due: "To plagiarize is to give the impression that you have written something original which in fact you have borrowed from another without acknowledging that other person's work" (*Guide for Research and Writing*, 2016, p. 11-13). If you borrow ideas or distinctive phrases, or include direct quotations in your written assignments, you must acknowledge your source(s) properly by in-text citation or

footnote. It is also wrong to copy another person's work or to submit an assignment previously handed in for credit in another course. **Students guilty of plagiarism may receive a grade of zero for the assignment and may be brought to the attention of the Seminary's Academic Committee.**

### *3. COURSE WITHDRAWAL POLICY*

After the period for which tuition refunds are available, a "W" will be placed on the transcript of a student who withdraws from any course. Beyond those dates, an "F" will be recorded on the student's transcript.

DRAFT