

Theology of the Human Person (0646)

Department of Theology

Tyndale Seminary

Winter 2009

Tuesday at 8:30 a.m.

Office Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday by appointment

Instructor: The Reverend Dr V. Shepherd

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Description

This course endeavours to acquaint students with the theology of the human person. It focuses on biblical and doctrinal issues that bear upon such questions as “What does it mean to be a human being?”, “What is meant by the ‘image of God’?”, “How is the Person of God related to the personhood of human beings?”

Outcomes:

Students will be able

- 1] to articulate how a proper understanding of God entails a proper understanding of humankind; i.e., that since theology discusses all of life under God, “theology” necessarily includes “theological anthropology”;
- 2] to probe the relation of Christology to anthropology;
- 3] to discern the manner in which the non-objectifiable “Thou” of God and the “thou” of the neighbour are determinants of the human;
- 4] to recognize non-theological anthropologies that students may have absorbed implicitly or that different philosophies, psychologies and psychotherapies endorse explicitly;
- 5] to identify areas of convergence and divergence concerning social scientific and theological perspectives on the human person;
- 6] to investigate how gender specificity and gender complementarity are related to humanness;
- 7] to examine frequently misunderstood Christian notions (e.g., sin, evil, grace, providence, love, forgiveness) that pertain immediately to our understanding of the human and our attempts at relieving human distress.

Prerequisite:

Students must have completed Systematic Theology I&II (THEO 0521, 0522)

Requirements:

- 1] a written comment on a novel, short story, poem or movie, the comment to reflect the student’s **theological** assessment of the implicit anthropology in the item under discussion (700 words)
Due: February 3. [Note: The grade on papers that are late will be reduced by 2% per day.]
- 2] a major essay (2500-3000 words) Due: April 21 at the conclusion of the exam.
[Note: No paper may be submitted after April 21.]
- 3] a final examination

Textbook:

To be purchased: Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Fuller Seminary Press, reprinted 2000) ISBN 0-9602638-4-5

Evaluation:

Comment:	20%
Essay:	40%
Exam:	40%
	<u>100%</u>

Please note:

- 1] The student handbook should be consulted for matters pertaining to academic integrity.
- 2] A select bibliography will be handed out in class.

Class Schedule for Theology of the Human Person: Winter 2009

Jan. 13	The Enlightenment and Its Understanding of the Human The Patristic “gift” of the person (Shepherd) Preface to <i>On Being Human</i>
Jan. 20	Toward a theological anthropology (chapt. 1, <i>On Being Human</i>)
Jan. 27	Humanity as creatureliness (chapt. 2)
Feb. 3	Humanity as determined by the Word of God (chapt. 3)
Feb. 10	Humanity as determined by the “other” (chapt. 4)
Feb. 17	<i>No Class. Professor Shepherd is speaking at McGill University, Montreal.</i>
Feb. 24	Humanity as self-determined (chapt. 5)
Mar. 3	The image of God (chapt. 6)
Mar. 10	Human self-contradiction and eschatological resolution (chapt. 7)
Mar. 17	Gender (specificity and complementarity) and its relation to the human (chapt. 8)
<i>Mar. 24</i>	<i>Reading Week – No Class</i>
Mar. 31	The limits to the human creature: birth, historicity and death (chapt. 9)
Apr. 7	Apparent denials of the human (chapt. 10)
Apr. 14	Election, covenant, atonement -- and human authenticity (chapt. 11)
Apr. 21	Examination

Comment Topics

The understanding of the human in the fiction (novels and/or short stories) of any one of the following:

Hugh MacLennan, Roberston Davies, Brian Moore, Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Rohinton Mistry, Alice Munro, Iris Murdoch, John Updike, [or the writer of your choice.]

The understanding of the human in the work of any one major poet; e.g., Seamus Heaney, Margaret Avison, George Bowering, John Steffler [current Poet Laureate of Canada], Ted Hughes, Robert Frost, Andrew Motion [current Poet Laureate of U.K.], Billy Collins, Louise Glueck, Kay Ryan [current Poet Laureate of U.S.A.] (Please check with instructor.)

The understanding of the human in the work of one major lyricist; e.g., Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Tom Waits.

The understanding of the human in the film(s) of your choice. (Please check with instructor.)

Essay Topics

A

- 1] theological comment on the humanness of severely mentally ill (i.e., psychotic) people, as well as on the humanness of those who react to them, in any **one** of the following:
 - The Professor and the Madman* (Simon Winchester)
 - I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (Hannah Green)
 - Twilight* (Elie Wiesel)
 - Is There No Place on Earth for Me?* (Susan Sheehan)
 - The Bell Jar* (Sylvia Plath)
 - I Know This Much is True* (Wally Lamb)
- 2] theological comment on the humanness of severely neurologically damaged people, as well as on the humanness of their helper, in any five patients discussed in *Awakenings* (Oliver Sacks.) [The “prologue” of *Awakenings* should also be read in conjunction with the case histories of the five patients.]
- 3] theological comment on the humanness of those suffering from Alzheimer’s Disease, together with that of their caregivers: *Scar Tissue* (Michael Ignatieff.)
- 4] theological comment on issues pertaining to the understanding of the human in any **one** of the following:
 - social-environmental stress: *On the Beach* (Neville Shute)
 - : *Angela’s Ashes* (Frank McCourt)
 - : *Alias Grace* (Margaret Atwood)
 - stress born of dysfunctional communication: *The Trial* (Franz Kafka)
 - stress with poor provision: *In Cold Blood* (Truman Capote)
 - : *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Steinbeck)
- 5] theological comment on the understanding of the human presupposed in social responses to stress in any **one** of the following:
 - Asylums* (Erving Goffman)
 - Lord of the Flies* (William Golding)
- 6] theological comment on the understanding of the human with respect to suicide:
 - Night Falls Fast* (Kay Redfield Jamison) [This book is a work in social science.]
 - or**
 - theological comment on issues surrounding suicide following bi-polar mood disorder: *Swing Low: A Life* (Miriam Toews) [This book is biographical, a depiction of her father’s upbringing, domestic relationships, church and social environment, and psychiatric decline.]

- 7] theological comment on the understanding of the human as exemplified in community/institution/state-sanctioned violence: **one** of *Dead Man Walking* (Helen Rejean)
Night (Elie Wiesel)
The House of the Dead (Fyodor Dostoyevsky)
- 8] a discussion of the *imago Dei* in any **one** of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, Wesley, Barth, Brunner.
- 9] the relation of the hamartiological to the human through an investigation of any **one** of the traditional “Seven Deadly Sins”: pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony, lust.
- 10] the relation of the holy to the human through an investigation of any **one** of the traditional “saints”: e.g., Augustine, Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales, Catherine of Siena, John of the Cross.
- 11] a discussion of the theological anthropology of *Life Together* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).
- 12] the anthropology embodied in an exegesis of any **one** of Genesis 1&2, Genesis 3, Genesis 22, Psalm 25, Psalm 51, Psalm 103, Psalm 139, Ruth.
- 13] the anthropology evinced in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*.
- 14] theological discussion of the integration of the human and the sexual.
- 15] theological discussion of the anthropology exemplified in an individual’s response to social catastrophe (plague): *Year of Wonders* (Geraldine Brooks)
or
personal catastrophe (paralysis): *Under the Eye of the Clock* (Christopher Nolan)
or
relentless personal/natural evil: *All the Little Live Things* (Wallace Stegner.)
- 16] theological discussion of the determination of the human at the hands of institutions, ideologies, images and “isms”: *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* (William Stringfellow.)
- 17] theological discussion of the anthropology reflected in “spiritual direction” in **one** of *Spiritual Friend* (Tilden Edwards); *Soul Friend* (Kenneth Leech)
- 18] theological assessment of the challenge/threat to the human occasioned by “virtual reality”: e.g. *The Extremes* (Christopher Priest)
- 19] a comparison of Hellenistic and Hebraic anthropologies: e.g., *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (Thorleif Boman.)
- 20] theological comment on the threat to the human posed by disinformation: *Propaganda* (Jacques Ellul.)
- 21] theological comment on the relation of the imaginative to the human: *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Bruno Bettelheim.)

- 22] theo-anthropology in the context of depression: *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* (William Styron) **and** *Malignant Sadness: The Anatomy of Depression* (Lewis Wolpert.)
- 23] theo-anthropology in the context of bi-polar affective disorder [manic-depressive illness]
A Brilliant Madness: Living with Manic-Depressive Illness (Patty Duke and Gloria Hochman)
or
An Unquiet Mind (Kay Redfield Jamison)
- 24] theological reflection on the presence of bi-polar affective disorder among the culturally creative: *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (Kay Redfield Jamison)
- 25] theological comment on the challenge to and triumph of the human amidst totalitarianism: e.g.,
One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn)
- 26] theological comment on the retention of the human amidst organ transplants and genetic engineering: e.g., *The Human Body Shop: The Engineering and Marketing of Life* (Andrew Kimbrell.)
- 27] theological comment on the nature and significance of the human in perpetrator and pardoner: e.g., *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (Simon Wiesenthal)
- 28] theological comment on the “ordinary” human face of radical evil:
e.g., *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Hannah Arendt)
- 29] theological comment on the latent anthropology in women’s (self-)victimization in love affairs:
Labyrinth of Desire: Women, Passion and Romantic Obsession (Rosemary Sullivan) [non-fiction]
Other Women (Evelyn Lau) [fiction]
- 30] theological exploration of the dimensions of the human reflected in the microcosm of a rural congregation: *Open Secrets: A Spiritual Journey through a Country Church* (Richard Lischer)
- 31] theological comment on the funeral director’s angle-of-vision on death and its aftermath:
The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade (Thomas Lynch)
- 32] theological assessment of war-intensified human cruelty/complexity: e.g.,
Crimes of War (Peter Hogg) [fiction]
or
Wolfsangel: A German City on Trial 1945-1948 (August Nigro) [history]
or
Charlie Johnson in the Flames (Michael Ignatieff) [fiction]
or
March (Geraldine Brooks) [fiction]
- 33] theological comment on psychological resilience amidst betrayal and abandonment:
White Oleander (Janet Fitch)
- 34] theological comment on survivors of sexual violation (rape): *Lucky* (Alice Sebold)
- 35] theological comment on the multidimensionality/complexity of the human being: biological, psychological (including the pathological,) social, political, familial, spiritual:

Bedlam (Greg Hollingshead)

- 36] theological comment on the psychological and spiritual anguish pertaining to the death of a child: *The Blood of the Lamb* (Peter DeVries)
- 37] theological comment on issues pertaining to self-willed human complication; e.g., marital infidelity and criminality: *Adultery* (Richard Wright)
- or**
- The Pilot's Wife* (Anita Shreve)
- or**
- Fortune's Rocks* (Anita Shreve)
- or**
- Light on Snow* (Anita Shreve)
- 38] theological comment on human complexity complicated by indecisiveness: *A Prayer for the Dying* (Steward O'Nan)
- 39] theological comment on the shrivelled humanness evident in religious fundamentalism: *A Complicated Kindness* (Miriam Toews)
- 40] theological comment on the complexity of intra-family dynamics and the ambiguities of fortuitous occurrences: *Saturday* (Ian McEwan)
- or**
- Atonement* (Ian McEwan)
- 41] theological comment on the “handicapped” person (deafness) and the “handicap” of “normalcy”: *Deafening* (Frances Itani)
- 42] theological comment on the damage wrought by ambition: *All He Ever Wanted to Be* (Anita Shreve)
- 43] theological comment on the religious issues apparent in the intersection of Jew, Christian and Muslim: *The Terrorist* (John Updike)
- 44] theological comment on a widow's grieving: *The Year of Magical Thinking* (Joan Didion)
- 45] theological reflection on suffering. (The student should engage theologically Stanley Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*.)
- 46] theological interaction with and comment upon the work of a major existentialist thinker; e.g., *The Fall* or *The Plague* (Albert Camus)
- 47] theological interaction with and comment on slavery; e.g., *The Book of Negroes* (Lawrence Hill)

B

- 1] an exposition and critical assessment of **one** crucial aspect of any one psychological anthropology in the light of Christian anthropology: e.g., Freud, Jung, Adler, James. (Please check with instructor.)

- 2] exposition and critical assessment of (an aspect of) any **one** philosophical anthropology in the light of Christian anthropology:
 e.g., Plato, Stoicism, Aristotle, Plotinus, Aquinas, Occam, Biel, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Sartre, Heidegger. (Please check with instructor.)
- 3] an exposition and critical assessment of the understanding of the human (or aspect thereof) in any **one** of Mediaeval Scholasticism, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Existentialism.

C

- 1] a discussion of the anthropology reflected in the “anti-psychiatry” movement (e.g., Thomas Szasz, MD, *The Myth of Mental Illness* -- pp. ix - 110, plus 204-220.)
 [Note: there are now many psychiatrist-authored books and journal articles written from the standpoint of “anti-psychiatry.” Please check with instructor. This topic is best addressed by students with formal medical training.]
- 2] an examination of the command and claim of God upon humans reflected in *Fear and Trembling* (Soren Kierkegaard.)
 [Note: this topic should be attempted only by those who have been exposed to the philosophy of Georg Friedrich Hegel.]
- 3] an exposition of and comment on *Persons In Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Alan J. Torrance)
 [Note: this topic is to be attempted only by the advanced student in theology who is acquainted with the theological subtleties of Barth and the Torrance echelon.]
- 4] a discussion of the “dialogical” in *I and Thou* (Martin Buber.)
 [Note: this topic should be attempted only by those with more than elementary philosophical training.]

D

{a topic of the student’s choice, provided that the instructor has approved it.}