

MTS 501A- MTS Colloquy
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What follows is our syllabus for this semester's colloquy. Please note that the first two colloquies are devoted to autobiographical introductions. To make this work effectively, please write a 1-2 page bio, but write the bio you would like us to know. How should we relate to you in this colloquy? What are the interests you have and how do you understand our goals for the next year?

Two of the important elements of the MTS program are its open-ended nature and its design to connect theological reflection upon both ecclesial and non-ecclesial settings. Though both MDIV and MTS students share many of the same concerns, at other points they have quite different objectives. Since the MTS program relies heavily on other parts of the curriculum to supply its courses, and since those courses are often influenced significantly by the concerns of MDIV students, it is important to designate some time for conversations that are focused specifically on these elements. And we need to find moments for attending to those questions without apology. The colloquy is an important part of the MTS curriculum because it provides a forum for that discussion. It is the one time during the school year when MTS students can discuss among themselves the issues and convictions that led them to pursue the degree.

In order to facilitate this conversation we have chosen different topics and themes through the last five years. These have ranged from conceptions of suffering and prayer to post-modern understandings of religion and its modern expression. Each year the colloquy uses one of these topics as a window into the larger topic of religion and culture or religion in the public sphere.

This year we have chosen as our focus—environmental concerns. In the last 20-30 years this has become an important topic in theological discussions. Not a dominant one, but an important one, nonetheless. There are numerous questions wrapped into this topic. For instance, what is the relationship of the human to other parts of the creation: should it be seen as one among many or steward for the many? Christianity has been championed and vilified by environmental advocates. Some argue that its tradition lead to a disregard for the environment, others that its traditions lead to an honoring of it. This debate is, in fact, internal to the problem of Christian traditions and their appropriation. Hence, a by-product of our conversation will be to take up the interpretation principles that lead advocates and critics to make their decisions.

It is hard to come out "Anti-Environment" without being self-contradictory. On the other hand, this is not the real question that scholars, advocates, and theologians are asking. Instead they are contemplating and debating what constitutes a responsible life within the environment.

The readings that we will consider take up different sides of the conversation. Our point is not (at least initially) to decide who must be correct and who must be wrong. Rather, we want to gain deeper understanding of the issues that are under discussion and then to consider how we might enter into the discussion. Finally, we will and should begin the discussion about what we individually and as a community can do to live within our surroundings in a mutually enhancing manner.

I think that you will be surprised by the nature (no pun intended) of the questions and the implications their answers can have on theological discussions.

The colloquy will meet on Tuesday nights from 7:00-8:30. The first 15 minutes of each session will be spent discussing concerns, common interests, and a general overview of that evening's conversation. Then we will divide into discussion groups and attend to the assigned readings with some more detail. Attendance and participation in the colloquy discussions is expected, including the completion of all writing assignments.

Occasionally, we will ask you to write a précis for the week's reading (3 times during the semester). In the précis we ask that you do three things (roughly a paragraph each): 1) summarize the argument and its salient points, 2) describe one point of the reading that you think is especially important, 3) explain why this point is important for the larger conversation. Since the course is structured in a seminar fashion, and relies on each student being prepared to discuss the reading selections, please give yourself plenty of time to think through a reading selection and to gain an appreciation for the author's points of view. One may not master all the information in an article, and it highly unlikely that you will agree with every write that we consider. That is less important than determining why he or she made the argument in the first place and in understanding how she or he came to the conclusions. The important points to be gained are the ability to engage the author's arguments and to learn how to attend to the thoughts of our peers.

Course Schedule

September 3-	Student Autobiographical Statements
September 10-	Student Autobiographical Statements
September 17-	Student Autobiographical Statements
September 24-	E. O. Wilson, <i>The Future of Life</i>
October 1-	P. Hay, <i>Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought: I</i> “The Ecological Impulse/Ecophilosophy,” 1-71
October 8-	P. Hay, <i>Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought: II</i> “Religion, Spirituality and the Green Movement,” 94-119
October 15-	M. Northcutt, <i>The Environment and Christian Ethics</i> , 40-85; 124-163
October 22-	L. White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” In <i>The Care of the Creation</i> , ed. R. J. Berry, 31-42
October 29-	Response to White: T. Derr, “Environmental Ethics and Christian Humanism,” 17-103
November 5-	Berry, <i>Befriending The Earth</i> , 3-37; 92-129
November 12-	T. Hiebert, “The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in Christian Traditions,” In <i>Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans</i> , 135-154
November 19-	C. Newsom, “Common Ground: An Ecological Reading of Gen 2-3,” in <i>The Earth Story in Genesis</i> ed. N. Habel, 60-72
November 26-	THANKSGIVING
December 3-	Final Colloquy: Party SK and Carol Smith House