Some hopes for the course

This class seeks to make connections between critical, theological resources and some of the most basic practices of Christian life. These connections can illumine daily events in pastoral ministry as full of theological significance. They can enrich theoretical reflection even as they make that reflection more immediately relevant for everyday life. Learning to see these connections is itself a habit and a skill that the course seeks to cultivate.

The course is designed to help students develop habits for truly excellent work. In particular, students will gain new skills for reading complex texts and for writing with clarity and power. Reading and writing assignments will sometimes be difficult, but they will always be short and tightly focused. Significant amounts of help will be available for every assignment from both the instructor and from colleagues. The course is built on the assumption that students can make important contributions to larger conversations about Christian ethics and practice. The possibility of publication stands as a sign of that hope, assumption, and vocation.

The class itself is a form of Christian practice. That realization prompts both a (contentious!) set of standards by which to measure the class and an opportunity for ongoing reflection. We'll try to step back regularly to learn from and critique the practice we are already engaged in together.

Texts

Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition.*
Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology.*

Additional readings are on reserve behind the circulation desk at Pitts Theology Library. Reserve readings are also available in electronic form on Reserves Direct.

Because the class will read texts closely together, each student should bring her or his own copy of each text to each class.
Schedule

I. INTRODUCTION

9/1 Welcome and sneak preview

9/3 Beginning the story at the end
Miroslav Volf, “Theology for a Way of Life,” pp. 245-263 in PT.

II. THEORIES OF PRACTICE

A. A genealogy of the cultural turn in ethics and theology

9/8 Practicing social concepts
Emile Durkheim, selections from Elementary Forms of Religious Life (res.)

9/10 Ethos and worldview
Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System.” (res.)

9/15 Religion as a cultural-linguistic system
George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 87-125. (res.)

9/17 Practice within a tradition
Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, pp. 181-225. (res.)

9/22 Practice makes perfect
Stanley Hauerwas, “Perfection Without a Self” (res.)
Hauerwas, “Character, Narrative and Growth in the Christian Life” (res.)

9/24 Culture inside out and back again
Katie Canon, “Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick” (res.)
Delores Williams, Sisters in the Wilderness, pp. 204-254. (res.)
Assignment 2 distributed.

9/29 Revisions and connections
*** Assignment 2 due ***
Optional: Students may revise one quiz for a full-credit reevaluation.
No class session.

B. Reconsiderations

10/1 Reconsidering culture
Kathryn Tanner, Theories of Culture, chapters 2 and 3

10/6 Reconsidering theology and culture
Tanner, Theories of Culture, chapters 6 and 7

10/8 Reconsidering practice: objective intention and transmigration
Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice, chapter 2
Optional: Bourdieu, Chapter 1
10/13  **Reconsidering practice: performance**  
Catherine Bell, “Performance” (res.)

10/15  **Reconsidering tradition**  
Theodor Adorno, “On Tradition”  
Johann-Baptist Metz, “The Future in the Memory of Suffering”

10/20  **Democratic traditions**  
Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, Table of Contents, chapters 5 and 6.

10/22  **Traditional democracy**  
Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, chapter 12 and conclusion.

10/27  **Two-ness and hope**  
W.E.B. DuBois, selections from *The Souls of Black Folk*:  

**OCTOBER 29 MID-TERM EXAMINATION**

### III. PARTICULAR PRACTICES

#### A. READING SCRIPTURE

11/3  **The Church’s Book**  
Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?*, pp. 305-321. (res.)  
At the site go to the “Library.” Under “Subject” select “Practice Essays.”  
The essay by Amanda Musterman grew out of this class in 2002.  
You might also begin to look at material on practices that interest you most.  
Introduction of the writing project

11/5  **Whose book? Which church? [pick at least two readings]**  
David Adamo, *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African Indigenous Churches*, pp. 85-103. (res.)  
George Marsden, “Everyone One’s Own Interpreter?: The Bible, Science and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth Century America” (res.)  
Tanner, “Theology and the Plain Sense” (res.)  
Renita Weems, “Reading Her Way Through the Struggle...” (res.)

#### B. HOSPITALITY

11/10  **Hospitality and Community**  
Christine D. Pohl, “A Community’s Practice of Hospitality: The Interdependence of Practices and of Communities” in PT  
Gilbert I. Bond, “Liturgy, Ministry, and the Stranger: The Practice of Encountering the Other in Two Christian Communities” in PT

11/12  **Hospitality and Hostility**  
Jacques Derrida, “Hospitality” (res.)  
Adorno, “Articles may not be exchanged” and “Service to the customer,” pp. 42-43 and 200-201 in *Minima Moralia* (res.)

**** Essay plans are due ****
C. DISCERNMENT

11/17 What are meetings for?
Charles M. Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, pp. 27-46 (res.)
Donald G. Matthews, “United Methodism and American Culture: Testimony, Voice, and the Public Sphere” (res.)

11/19 Who are meetings for?
Tex Sample, *Blue-Collar Ministry*, pp. 119-132 (res.)
Iris Marion Young, “Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy” (res.)

D. KEEPING SABBATH

11/24 The Sabbath keeps us
Exodus 16:1-36; Deuteronomy 15:1-6; Mark 2:23 – 3:6
Bass, “Keeping Sabbath” (res.)
Adorno, “Free Time” (res.)

11/26 Thanksgiving vacation
No class

E. TESTIMONY

12/1 Sincerity and authenticity
Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 185-198 (res.)
Jeffrey Rosen, “The Naked Crowd” (res.)
Optional: Ted A. Smith, “The Measure of the Self” (res.)

**** Essay drafts are due. (Bring THREE COPIES to class.) ****

IV. LAST THINGS

12/3 Grace, eschatology and practice
2 Corinthians 1-7
Sarah Coakley, “Deepening Practices” in PT, 78-93

End of class sessions.

12/6 **** Comments on colleagues’ papers are due by noon. ****

Essays are due in the instructor’s mailbox by the time the final exam for this course is scheduled to end.
ASSIGNMENTS
One of the main goals of this class is to develop good habits of reading and writing. While good reading and good writing are inseparable, the first half of the semester will focus on reading and the second half on writing. Each half consists of a series of smaller assignments that culminate in a larger one.

1. Quizzes on the reading: Each class session in the first half will begin with a quiz on the reading. The quizzes are designed to help students focus on what is important in difficult texts and to ensure high-quality discussion.

   Each quiz will present the student with two quotes and ask the student to comment on one of them. Because the quizzes are intended to be guides for reading, not surprises, students will receive in advance a short list of quotations from which the two quotes on the quiz will be drawn. A good comment will (1) explain what the quote means and (2) relate it to the main idea(s) of the reading as a whole. The comment should not try to move into critical appraisals and should not merely register a student's response -- there will be time for both of those in discussion. A good comment should be a kind of exegesis.

   Students will have ten minutes for each quiz. Quizzes can receive a maximum of ten points, with grades assigned as follows:

   0 nothing turned in
   7 the comment makes an honest attempt to interpret the quotation
   8 the comment gets something about the quotation right
   9 the comment interprets the main point correctly or correctly relates it to the work as a whole
   10 the comment interprets the main point correctly and correctly relates it to the work as a whole

The quizzes will be completed without reference to books or notes. Students may neither make up quizzes nor turn them in late, but they may drop the lowest three quiz scores. Taken together the quizzes will count for 20% of the student's final grade.

2. Integrative essay: Students will write a short essay that integrates class readings in a critical way. The essay should be 2-3 pages in length. On September 24 a list of quotations will be distributed in class. Students will pick two of the quotations as starting points for the essay. Students will then write an essay in five paragraphs:

   (i) The first paragraph of the essay will very briefly introduce both quotations and state a thesis.
   (ii) The second paragraph will comment on the first quotation, restating it in new words and explaining its key concepts.
   (iii) The third paragraph will comment on the second quotation in a similar way.
   (iv) The fourth paragraph will make connections between the quotations. Good connections will illumine each quotation. Students might compare and contrast the quotes, arrange them in a developmental narrative, argue that they constitute a single conversation that leaves out the most important issues, or fit them together in other ways.
The fifth paragraph will evaluate the two quotations in light of their connections. A good evaluation might make such moves as arguing for one view against the other, explaining why both are wrong, taking something from each to develop a new position, or relating the two in a narrative of progress or decline.

Essays are due September 29 and will count for 10% of a student’s final grade.

3. Mid-term examination on the readings: On October 29 the class will have a mid-term examination in two parts. Part I will be just like the quizzes, asking students to comment on quotations from the readings. Most of the quotes will be taken directly from previous quizzes. Part II will present students with five quotes and ask them to make connections between three of them. The connections should be like those made in Assignment 2. Each quotation should receive one paragraph of exegesis. Then a fourth paragraph should relate the three to one another. A fifth and final paragraph should present and give reasons for the student’s critical judgment. The exam counts for 30% of the total course grade. Students needing to reschedule the examination must ask the instructor by October 25.

4. Essay: Students will work throughout the second half of the semester on a single, short, excellent essay of about six pages.

a. The essay should consider one of the twelve practices featured on www.practicingourfaith.org.

b. The essay should be aimed at an educated but wide audience – not just people in the class, and not just specialists in the field. It should not use footnotes and should try to use internal citations gracefully. For good examples of the form, see feature articles in The Christian Century and essays on the Practicing Our Faith and Baylor Center for Christian Ethics websites (links from Blackboard page). The class readings from Hauerwas, Bass, Pohl, Bond, Sample, Weems, and DuBois also provide a good set of possible models. For still more examples, see essays by Wendell Berry, Katha Pollitt, bell hooks, and David Brooks.

c. The essay should be informed by class readings. Readings from Part II of the syllabus (“Theories of Practice”) will help students develop a theory of practice that informs the essay. Readings from Part III (“Particular Practices”) will provide both concepts and models. The “essay plan” due on November 12 should outline the student’s theory of practice and make clear how readings will be used. The essay itself might make use of class readings without citing them specifically.

d. The essay could pursue many different methods. It might involve observation of a particular community (like the essay by Pohl on hospitality). Or it might involve historical work (like the essay by Marsden on reading scripture). It might also be a theological or theoretical analysis (like Derrida on hospitality or Bass on keeping Sabbath). Students should feel free to use a wide variety of methods and styles – the best
methods will be the ones that best fit the subject matter. While the essay itself might not explicitly discuss method, the “essay plan” should make clear what methods will be used and why.

e. Excellent essays will be clear, precise and interesting. They will have no errors in grammar or spelling. Students are strongly encouraged to work in small groups and to work with the Candler Writing Program as they write their essays.

f. Essays should include a 1-2 sentence abstract at the top of the first page. The abstract should state the main argument of the essay as precisely as possible. A good abstract not only helps focus the writing process, but also helps potential readers and reviewers.

g. The essay will be due in three parts:
   1. An essay plan (2 pages max.) should: (a) name the practice to be considered; (b) describe the theory of practice that will inform the essay; (c) propose a method of inquiry (observation of a particular community, interpretation of Scripture, history, etc.); and (d) list a preliminary bibliography. The essay plan should make clear the role of class readings in the essay. Due November 12.
   2. Three copies of a first draft will be due at the beginning of class on December 1. Students will exchange these drafts with one another, both to share the wealth of their work and to practice giving and receiving comments.
   3. A final draft of the essay will be due in the instructor’s mailbox (#35, Bishops Hall) by the end of the time scheduled for the exam for this course.

h. The essay counts for 30% of the class grade. Excellent essays will be considered for publication on www.practicingourfaith.org. Go for it!

5. Comments on other students’ work: Each student will read and comment on two essays by other students. Comments should be typed and sent by email attachment to the paper’s author and to the course instructor no later than noon on December 6. Excellent comments will consist of terse, numbered entries. The entries might be questions, reflections or suggestions. Excellent comments need not do any copyediting, but they will consider issues of writing like style, clarity, and organization. They will also consider the subject matter of the essay: Does the essay use the best methods for its subject matter? Who or what does it not see? Whose perspectives and interests does it serve? How does it use concepts from the class readings? Which virtues does the essay manifest, and which virtues does it lack? Is it faithful, generous, brave, honest and attentive? Excellent comments will speak the truth in love, combining in right measure questions, criticism, encouragement, appreciation, instruction and exhortation. This assignment hopes to give students a chance to exchange ideas with one another and to develop students’ writing skills by giving them a chance to edit colleagues’ work. It will count for 10% of the total course grade.
**Late work:** Late work will not be accepted without an extension from the instructor. Because so many of the assignments interlock with one another and with the work of other students, extensions can be given only in extreme emergencies, and only when the student contacts the instructor before the assignment is due. No extensions can be given for the most directly interactive work – the quizzes (which set up discussion), the draft of the essay (which goes to student editors), and the comments on that draft (which the authors need to complete their work). Reading assignments taper off to give students time to do the work they need to do on the essays. Please plan ahead and work steadily on projects throughout the semester.

This class will be conducted in accordance with the Candler Honor and Conduct Code.