

TC5XX: THEOLOGY AND THEATRE. Todd E. Johnson and Dale Savidge.

DESCRIPTION: The origins of theatre are in the simple act of one person telling another person a story.

Theatre occurs, in part, when one tells the story by manifesting – incarnating – the story. As Christian disciples we are invited to tell the story of the gospel by our embodying the story in our daily lives. This course will serve as an introductory survey of issues found at the intersection of theology and theatre. It will cover the nature of narrative in worship and evangelism, explore the place of drama in worship, examine theatre which addresses religious and theological themes, and evaluate the place of Christians in theatre. All this will be done against the backdrop of the prevailing cultural narratives as well as a developing culture of sensationalism.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: The primary goal of this course is to develop a conversation between theology and theatre. Exploring criteria from theology (incarnation, community, presence) and theatre (ritual, performance, rehearsal), we will use theatre to illumine theology and theology to shed light on theatrical processes. To do this the students will (1) explore the intersection of theatre and Christian discipleship, (2) learn the history of the relationship between Christianity and theatre, (3) examine how a theology of the body might inform acting theories, (4) investigate how theatre intersects with Christian worship and (5) appreciate the role of theatre in the recreational life of a Christian.

RELEVANCE FOR MINISTRY: When a person attends a performance, such as a concert or a play, there is an expectation that “something will happen.” Whether this is understood through Aristotelian catharsis or sensory stimulation, one is disappointed when these expectations are not met. How does the Christian faith evaluate these cultural expectations? How ought the church respond when these criteria are placed upon the church’s evangelism and worship? This class invites a two-way dialogue which evokes wisdom from the theatre arts on how to improve the communication of the gospel in a media-driven culture, while at the same time offers a Christian appraisal of the cultural expectations placed on the dramatic arts as an incarnate art form.

COURSE FORMAT: The course will be conducted online through postings and chat; the online portion will culminate in a week long summer intensive. It will involve discussion of readings, as well as various approaches to applying the concepts in this class to pastoral praxis and theatre. It will require students to attend plays and church and offer written responses to those experiences. During the residence week the students will attend a play with the professors. The course grade will be based on projects involving case studies and other exercises of applications of course material.

REQUIRED READING:

Anderson, Herbert, and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals*. Jossey-Bass, 1998. 180 pages.

Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. PAJ, 1982. 122 pages.

Eliot, T.S. *Murder in the Cathedral*. 88 pages.

Harris, Max. *Theatre and Incarnation*. Eerdmans, 1990. 80 pages.

Johnson, Todd and Dale Savidge. *Theology and Theatre* (unpublished ms), 150 pages.

Johnstone, Keith. *Impro. Theatre Arts Book, 1980*. 140 pages.

Lowry, Eugene. *The Homiletic Plot*. John Knox Press, 1980. 80 pages.

Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Penguin, 1985. 60 pages.

Shaffer, Peter. *Equus*. Penguin, 1984. 100 pages.

Sophocles. *Antigone*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, 110 pages.

Course Reader. 100 pages.

ASSIGNMENTS: (1) Completion of assigned readings, attendance & participation in class discussions including on-line postings one week before class meets These posts include: an introduction to the class, and report on a play one has seen in the past month, and two one-page reaction papers to course readings
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[15%]. (2) A report of a participant observation of a Christian Worship Service including an evaluation of the narrative qualities of a sermon [15%]. (3) A report of a participant observation of the performance of a play (to be seen as a class) [25%]. (4) A synthesis project proposed by the student and approved by the professor [45%].

PREREQUISITES: None.

RELATIONSHIP TO CURRICULUM: Fulfills concentration requirement in the MA in Theology (Theology & the Arts format). Meets interdisciplinary requirement (IDPL) for MACL (Integrative Studies).