Eschatology and Envisioning the Future:  
What’s (the) Good?  
Syllabus *DRAFT*

Brandy Daniels  
Spring 2017  
Mondays, 1:00-3:50

COURSE DESCRIPTION:  
Eschatology, from the Greek ἔσχατος (eschatos) is the study or discourse of the last, final, or farthest things—it is the area of theology that deals with the ultimate destiny of creation. Both cosmic and particular, its scope ranges from the universe, to the earth, humanity, and all the way down to the final state of individual people.

This course explores the subject of Christian eschatology, including various approaches, key themes, and debates in theological literature, in and through conversation with contemporary scholarship on “the future” in cultural studies and critical theories.

What do different eschatologies say about the future? How do these eschatologies draw upon Scripture, the Christian tradition, and other doctrines, particularly Christology, in their accounts, and how does that shape their reflections on the future? What is the role of human agency in envisioning the future? How does the future relate to the events of history? Does reflection on the future play any role in or for social transformation? Through exploring these questions (and many others), this course introduces students to key themes in eschatology, demonstrates the prospects for mutual illumination of eschatology and critical theoretical reflections on the future, and explores the impact of “future-thinking” on/for theology, ethics, ministry, and social justice work.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:  
1. To acquire a basic knowledge of the Christian doctrine of eschatology and the diversity of theological approaches, themes, and debates prevalent in eschatological reflection, as well as basic knowledges of critical theoretical reflections on futurity and the ethical dimensions of and in those discourses; to begin to integrate and synthesize theological and ethical reflection, cultural studies and critical theory, and ministry and social action.

2. To critically evaluate models of and for the future in light of eschatological reflections (and vice versa), in conversation with critical theories, historical and Scriptural influences, social locations, and broader theological and ethical frameworks.

3. To enhance capacity and imagination for constructive theological and ethical reflection and praxis related to eschatological reflection in relation to envisioning and engendering a better, more just future; to exhibit pastoral imagination and prepare to lead just and sustainable religious communities.
**Required Texts:**


**Schedule:**

**Week 1: Why (think about) the future?**


Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope,* chapter 1, pp.1-25.

*Recommended:*

Thomas More, *Utopia.* [B]

*1. Eschatology: A Theological “Timeline”*

**Week 2: Creation and fall**


Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall,* pp. 60-120.

*Recommended:*


Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall,* pp. 1-59
**Week 3: Christology**

Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, III.21-6. Jesus, pp. 91-106. [B]


**Week 4: Eschatological ends**


**Recommended:**

Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, chapter V., pp. 149-187.

**Week 5: What dare we hope?**


Hans Urs Von Balthasar, “The Obligation to Hope for All” and “Epilogue: Apokatastasis: Universal Reconciliation.” In *Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved?”* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), np. [B]

Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, chapter XI., pp. 391-423. [B]


Crawford, *Hope in the Holler*, introduction, pp. xi-xviii. [B]
II. Eschatology and time (and space)

Week 6: Continuity—time, history, progress


Week 7: Discontinuity—annihilation, eternity

Bauckham and Hart, Hope Against Hope, chapter 3, pp. 44-71.


Yoder, “God Will Fight for Us.” In The Politics of Jesus, pp. 76-88. [B]

Week 8: Beyond a neat binary? Apocalyptic, etc.


Bauckham and Hart, Hope Against Hope, chapter 4, pp. 72-108.


III. Eschatology, time and space, and ethics

Week 9: Continuity—the hope of progress


Schwarz, “The Liberating Power of Eschatology.” In Eschatology, pp. 152-165. [B]


Recommended:


Week 10: Discontinuity—the problems, limits, and realities of progress


Bauckham and Hart, Hope Against Hope, chapter 2, pp. 26-43.

Week 11: Interim existence—between the already and the not-yet

Morse, The Difference Heaven Makes, chapter 4, pp. 75-98.


Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall, pp. 121-146.

Crawford, Hope in the Holler, chapters 2-4, pp. 15-89.

Week 12: Beyond the binary? Theology and Ethics in an Eschatological Time & Space


Fred Moten, “Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh).” South Atlantic Quarterly 112.4 (2013), pp. 737-780. [B]


**Week 13: Hope against hope?**


Bauckham and Hart, Hope Against Hope, chapters 5 & 6, epilogue, pp. 109-212.

T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets. [B]

**Assignments:**

Zero Drafts **due dates vary**

Students will write one “zero draft” for two class sessions in different sections of this course. Signups for these assignments will occur at the end of add/drop period, and the student(s) having done the zero draft for a particular day/reading (or set of readings, depending on the week/material in question) will be responsible for beginning the discussion for that class session/particular reading(s).
A zero draft is a detailed explication of a set of readings. It is similar to, but far more than, a book review or report: its objective is to articulate and outline the main points of the respective readings—the argument each is making, how they arrived at that argument, the context they are writing in, etc. — and the relation of the readings to one another. The aim is to not only articulate what the authors are doing, but to understand what they are doing and their place in relation to the other readings and the broader context of the semester. Further instruction on this assignment is available in a supplementary handout posted on Blackboard. These papers should be approximately **6-8 pages in length.**

Mid-Term Paper **due at the beginning of class, week 7**

**Option A: Ministry Resource and Reflection.** Students will create a ministerial resource—a sermon, an outline for a 4-week adult-education series, an order of service for worship or a community event—that responds to or reflects on the topics of this course. They will turn in the content of that resource, along with a **3-5 page** critical commentary offering a rationale for and reflection on their resource.

**Option B: Popular Cultural Engagement and Analysis.** Students will critically analyze a topic of this course through engagement with a popular cultural medium or current event, or will critically analyze a popular cultural medium or current event through engagement with a theme or text of this course. This reflection should be approximately **5-7 pages** in length, and students must obtain prior approval on their topic beforehand.

**Option C: Extended Research Paper.** Students will extend the depth and/or scope of their final paper assignment by approximately **7-10 pages.** Students choosing this option should turn in their abstracts, proposed bibliographies, and an extended abstract/research plan of **2-3 pages** by week 7.

**Final Paper** **proposals due week 9, paper due by final exam week**

The final paper will be an essay of original research, pursuing an original inquiry related to the topic of eschatology developed in relation to the themes of this course. This paper should be written and researched as if it were to be a conference paper presented at an academic conference of religion. The final paper should be **11-14 pages in length.** A proposal consisting of a 200-400 word abstract and proposed bibliography are due at the beginning of week 9 (or week 7, if choosing Midterm Option C), and the paper is due during the final exam week.

**Grading:**

- Attendance & Participation: 20%
- Zero drafts (2@10% each): 20%
- Midterm Paper: 25%
- Final Paper: 35%