

ST. MARY'S ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE
Summer 2018

Monday and Thursday evenings, 6:00 to 9:00pm, May 24—June 28 (no class May 28)

BS/ST676 A Time to Laugh: Humor in Scripture, Faith, and Practice

Rev. Dr. Chris Dreisbach & Dr. Rebecca Hancock

Course Description:

The teachings and traditions of Christianity and its pre-Christian roots include levels and varieties of humor that we often overlook. The Old Testament has God laughing sometimes in enjoyment and sometimes in mockery. The New Testament describes Jesus' use of irony, paradox, preposterousness, and banter. In both Testaments there are stories that make the most sense when considered as humorous, stories such as Jonah or the Parable of the Talents. Theologians have argued about the value of humor to Christian development, with some, such as Chrysostom, promoting a theology of tears and others, such as Karl-Josef Kuschell, promoting a Theology of Laughter. More generally, Christians are called to joy and celebration--tough tasks in the absence of humor. This course, then, studies the role of humor in Scripture, Christian faith, and Christian practice.

Students who complete the course will be able to

- Identify several views concerning the role of humor in the Bible and Christian tradition
- Demonstrate skills in critical examination of texts and ideas concerning humor in the Bible and Christian tradition
- Articulate their personal views about the role of humor in Christian interpretation of Scripture, and in Christian faith and practice
- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of one topic in the area of humor in the Bible and/or Christian tradition

Course Requirements:

- **Reading:** Students should expect to read at most 900 pages of required reading and should come prepared to discuss readings in class.
- **Writing:** Required writing assignments
 - Nine critical reflection papers (one due each class) with a maximum length of 300 words each: 55% of course grade
 - A final critical reflection or research paper (due in July) with a maximum length of 4000 words: 35% of course grade
- **Other:** Participation in evaluated class participation: 10% of course grade

Required Texts:

Dreisbach, C. *Your God is Too Somber* (manuscript, 2018). Available on the course's Canvas site.

Conrad Hyers, *And God Created Laughter* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), ISBN: 978-0804216531 (\$23.45 pbk)

James Martin, *Between Heaven and Mirth: Why Joy, humor, and Laughter are At the Heart of the Spiritual Life* (HarperOne, 2012), ISBN: 978-0062024251 (\$11.95 pbk)

Elton Trueblood, *The Humor of Christ* (Harper & Row, 1975), ISBN: 978-0060686321 (\$15.71 pbk)