Introduction to Christian Theology I

THEO 101601 Summer 2018
Boston College
Stokes Hall 121N
Monday and Wednesday 6:00-9:15pm

Professor: Dr. Emma O’Donnell
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office hours by appointment
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Course Description

This is the first part of a two-semester course, Introduction to Christian Theology I and II. It introduces students to the sources, content, and fundamental questions of the Christian theological tradition. This course guides students to explore the Christin theological tradition through the tools of the academic study of religion. The course begins by exploring the notion of religion, and introducing students to the academic study of religion and theology. Following this introduction, the course traces the emergence of the Christin theological tradition within its historical context, and its theological development through the centuries. The second part of the course, in the spring semester, studies the development and expression of theological questions and spiritual searching in literature, and explores contemporary forms of the Christian theological tradition in today’s world.

Purpose

The purpose of this course is to provide an academic investigation of a religious tradition that has had a great impact on world history, and continues to influence the world in countless ways. The course aims to offer students a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the sources and forms of this tradition, to enable them to better interpret the Christian theological tradition and its cultural and social impact on the world.

Participation in this course does not require belief in or practice of Christianity, nor does the course encourage or persuade students to adopt any particular religious belief or practice. Students are welcome to voice their own responses to and interpretations of the material, and are invited to feel equally free to express statements of faith, doubt, assent, or rejection of the theological traditions studied in this course. However, such statements must be made with recognition of the distinct difference between religious statements and statements about religion. That is, students must be able to distinguish between expressions of religious belief or lack thereof, on the one hand, and scholarly observations about religion, on the other hand. While this course welcomes students to express the former if they choose to do so, the course remains firmly grounded in the latter, examining the Christian theological tradition through the methods of the academic study of religion.
Required Texts


Course Requirements

- Completion of reading assignments
- Midterm exam, June 6
- Research Paper, due June 11
- Reflection Paper, due June 18
- Final Exam
- Regular Attendance
- Attention to and participation in class discussions

Grading

The final grade will be determined by the following components:
- 25% Midterm Exam
- 20% Research Paper
- 15% Reflection Paper
- 25% Final Exam
- 15% Class Participation

Research Paper Guidelines

**Length:** minimum 1600 words, maximum 1800 words. 
1600-1800 words will be approximately five to six pages of double-spaced text. Note that the length requirements are measured by words, not pages.

**Format:** Times New Roman font, double-spaced.

**Paper Topic:** Choose any topic or issue in the Christian theological tradition that is of particular interest to you, and within this topic, focus on one specific issue. It is best to be very specific and focused, and not too broad. For example, if you are interested in feminist theology, you must choose a specific issue within this field, such as contemporary interpretations of the gender of God in Christian theology. Or, if you are interested in the Jewish context out of which
Christianity developed, you must choose a more specific topic within this field, such as the portrayal of Jews in the gospel of John.

**Research Sources**
If your sources are complete books, you must use at least two books, not including the books used in this course. (You may also use the required course books, but they do not count toward the required number of sources.) If you use articles, you must consult a minimum of four; i.e., two articles count as one book.

Internet sources are not acceptable, unless they are scholarly publications, such as online academic journals. The following guide provides help in assessing online sources: [http://libguides.bc.edu/evaluating](http://libguides.bc.edu/evaluating)

**Reflection Paper Guidelines**
**Length:** 1000-1400 words
**Format:** Times New Roman font, double-spaced.

**Paper Topic:** With this assignment, you are asked to reflect on the ways that the course readings and discussions have made you think differently about Christianity. In this paper, you should probe your experience and your thoughts deeply, to shed light on how the course material has changed your thinking. You may choose either to reflect on your own experience of faith and how it has been affected during the class, or on your understanding of Christianity and its role in the world. The paper will be graded on two main criteria: depth and nuance of thought, and writing skills. So, to succeed with this assignment, you must probe your experience deeply and creatively, and you must also exercise careful use of academic writing skills.

**Boston College Mission Statement**
Strengthened by more than a century and a half of dedication to academic excellence, Boston College commits itself to the highest standards of teaching and research in undergraduate, graduate and professional programs and to the pursuit of a just society through its own accomplishments, the work of its faculty and staff, and the achievements of its graduates. It seeks both to advance its place among the nation's finest universities and to bring to the company of its distinguished peers and to contemporary society the richness of the Catholic intellectual ideal of a mutually illuminating relationship between religious faith and free intellectual inquiry.

Boston College draws inspiration for its academic societal mission from its distinctive religious tradition. As a Catholic and Jesuit university, it is rooted in a world view that encounters God in all creation and through all human activity, especially in the search for truth in every discipline, in the desire to learn, and in the call to live justly together. In this spirit, the University regards the contribution of different religious traditions and value systems as essential to the fullness of its intellectual life and to the continuous development of its distinctive intellectual heritage.
Important Policies
http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/schools/advstudies/guide/academicinteg.html

Written Work
Graduate and undergraduate students are expected to prepare professional, polished written work. Written materials must be typed in the format required by your instructor. Strive for a thorough, yet concise style. Cite literature appropriately, using APA, MLA, CLA format per instructors decision. Develop your thoughts fully, clearly, logically and specifically. Proofread all materials to ensure the use of proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. You are encouraged to make use of campus resources for refining writing skills as needed [http://www.bc.edu/libraries/help/tutoring.html].

Scholarship and Academic Integrity
It is expected that students will produce original work and cite references appropriately. Failure to reference properly is plagiarism. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not necessarily limited to, plagiarism, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, cheating on examinations or assignments, and submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without seeking permission of all instructors concerned. Scholastic misconduct may also involve, but is not necessarily limited to, acts that violate the rights of other students, such as depriving another student of course materials or interfering with another student’s work.

Request for Accommodations
If you have a disability and will be requesting accommodations for this course, please register with either Dr. Kathy Duggan (dugganka@bc.edu), Associate Director, Connors Family Learning Center (learning disabilities or AHD) or Dean Paulette Durrett, (paulette.durrett@bc.edu), Assistant Dean for students with disabilities, (all other disabilities). Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations. For further information, you can locate the disability resources on the web at http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/libraries/help/tutoring/specialservices.html.

Attendance
Class attendance is an important component of learning. Students are expected to attend all classes and to arrive by the beginning of and remain for the entire class period. When an occasion occurs that prevents a student from attending class, it is the student’s obligation to inform the instructor of the conflict before the class meets. The student is still expected to meet all assignment deadlines. If a student knows that he or she will be absent on a particular day, the student is responsible for seeing the instructor beforehand to obtain the assignments for that day. If a student misses a class, he or she is responsible for making up the work by obtaining a classmate’s notes and handouts and turning in any assignments due. Furthermore, many instructors give points for participation in class. If you miss class, you cannot make up participation points associated with that class. Types of absences that are not typically excused include weddings, showers, vacations, birthday parties, graduations, etc. Additional assignments, penalties and correctives are at the discretion of the instructor. If circumstances necessitate excessive absence from class, the student should consider withdrawing from the class. In all cases, students are expected to accept the decision of the instructor regarding attendance policies specific to the class.
Consistent with our commitment of creating an academic community that is respectful of and welcoming to persons of differing backgrounds, we believe that every reasonable effort should be made to allow members of the university community to observe their religious holidays without jeopardizing the fulfillment of their academic obligations. It is the responsibility of students to review course syllabi as soon as they are distributed and to consult the faculty member promptly regarding any possible conflicts with observed religious holidays. If asked, the student should provide accurate information about the obligations entailed in the observance of that particular holiday. However, it is the responsibility of the student to complete any and all class requirements for days that are missed due to conflicts due to religious holidays.

There may be circumstances that necessitate a departure from this policy. Feel free to contact the WCAS at 617-552-3900 for consultation.

**Course Calendar and Reading Assignments**

**Reading, May 16:**
Russell T. McCutcheon, “What is the Academic Study of Religion?” –available on Canvas

**Reading, May 21:**

John Bowker, “The Meaning of Religion,” introduction to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* –available on Canvas; also available online through BC library

**Reading, May 23**

Ninian Smart “Dimensions of Religion,” in *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1984), 6-12. –available on Canvas

**Reading, May 30**

**Reading, June 4**

McGrath, Chp. 4 “Christian History: An Overview” pp 121-134 (The Early Church section)

**June 6 – MIDTERM EXAM**

**Reading, June 6**
Bible:
Binding of Isaac: Genesis 22

**Reading, June 11**
McGrath, Chp. 2, “The Christian Bible”

**Reading, June 13**
Hebrew Bible
Jacob and Esau: Genesis 25:19-25:34.
Burning Bush: Exodus 3.

New Testament
Beatitudes: Mt. 5:1-5:16
Law and the Prophets: Mt. 5: 17-5:48
Not Peace, but a Sword: Mt. 10:16-10:39
Beginning of Gospel of John: John 1:1-1:18

**Reading, June 18**
McGrath, Chp. 3, “Christian Creeds and Beliefs,” pp 54-65; 74-78; 82-91; 112-120

**June 20**
Final exam