

Introduction to Christian Traditions

Boston University School of Theology

TF701 Fall 2014

Plenary: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:30 – 11:00 a.m., STH B19

Discussion Groups: Tuesdays, 11-12 (STH 441), 1-2 (STH 306, 319)

Wednesdays 2-3 (STH 306, B20); Thursdays 11-12 (STH 440)

Course website at <http://learn.bu.edu>

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The first semester of a two-course sequence, this course invites students to explore what it means to understand the world theologically—in a broad sense—through the lens of various Christian traditions. In studying challenges faced by individuals and communities of faith, both past and present, students acquire an understanding of the basic theological categories and frameworks that have guided Christians through the ages, gain an overview of the chronology of Christian history from its beginnings in the second century through the time of the Protestant Reformation, and learn the skills of thick contextual description and analysis. Our studies will be driven by the deep questions that haunted and shaped Christian communities of the past and those that still echo today. What was at stake for Christian communities in diverse times and places? What was at stake for the larger cultures in which those communities were embedded? What was at stake for the tradition—traditions of belief and worldview, ethical commitments and faithful practice?

Beginning with the emergence of Christianity in the ancient world, the course explores the ways in which various Christian individuals and communities have engaged the realities of a changing world by forging and re-forging interpretations of themselves, their traditions, and the broader societies in which they lived.

Goals

1. To introduce students to the richness of understanding the world theologically and to engage in historical and contextual analysis with theological imagination.

2. To familiarize students with the critical vocabularies and skills of theological and historical analysis necessary for understanding the world theologically, paying particular attention to how relevant concepts have been informed by various historical and social contexts.
3. To give students the opportunity to employ these critical vocabularies and skills for the sake of producing three graduate-level papers interpreting different themes of the course.

Plenaries

There are two plenary sessions each week (except where the calendar prohibits) that will mainly be lectures by the instructors. There will also be occasions for discussions between the instructors and for addressing questions from students arising in the discussion groups and from the lectures.

Discussion Groups

Discussion groups meet every week. These meetings focus discussion on the readings for the week and prior lectures, as well as the writing assignments. Each teaching assistant facilitates two groups so the discussion groups can be small and the dialogue can be robust and inclusive of all students.

Assignments

1. Preparation of reading responses based on the assigned primary source readings for section and at least one of the reading questions supplied by your section leader, due about every other week (a total of six responses; your section leader will assign you to a schedule). Each response should be about 400 words and must be submitted electronically to your section leader through the course website no later than eight o'clock on the night before your group meets. Late reading responses will be accepted for no more than half credit.
2. Papers –These assignments are meant to help you fulfill some of the main objectives of the course: namely, to identify the guiding frameworks used by Christians in the past to understand the world and to describe and analyze how contexts have shaped thinkers' categories, as well as how theologians have shaped, resisted or criticized their contexts. Students are responsible for writing three short papers for this course, with the following initial due dates and rough topics; you should consult with the TAs to refining the topics to your particular interests:
 - a. Paper One (ca. 1200 words), **due September 30** (optional revision due by Oct. 21): Write on one of the following, *either* a theological (i.) or a historical (ii.) topic, focusing on *one* main text or figure:
 - i. On the nature of Jesus Christ as conceived and institutionalized in the ancient world, and critical reflection of your own on this.

- ii. On the character of Christian communities, their structures, values, institutions, or social location in the ancient world, and critical reflection of your own on this.
- b. Paper Two (ca. 1500 words), **due November 4** (optional revision due by Nov. 18): Write on one of the following, *either* a theological (i.) or a historical (ii.) topic, choosing the opposite category from your first paper, and focusing on *two* main texts, figures, or movements:
 - i. On the nature of God as conceived and institutionalized in the late antique and medieval world, and critical reflection of your own on this.
 - ii. On the relationship of the Christian church to structures of political authority and exercise of power in the late antique and medieval world, and critical reflection of your own on this,
- c. Paper Three (ca. 2000 words), **due December 2**: Write on the following synthetic topic, incorporating historical and theological approaches, and drawing on at least *two* main texts, figures, or movements: How the understanding of the nature of the human person in relation to God and Christ changed (or was changed in some particular way by) ecclesiastical, social, or political institutions in the Reformation period, and critical reflection of your own on this.

Papers should be submitted electronically to your section leader by 5:00 on the date indicated. The papers will be returned to you as quickly as possible after the due date and you are encouraged to submit a revised version of each of the first two papers, if you wish, before the secondary due date indicated. The final paper cannot be rewritten. If a revised version is submitted, the grade recorded for that paper will be the average of the two drafts, weighted 70%/30% in favor of the second. You are encouraged to make use of the STH Writing Works center for help with academic writing in English.

- 3. Final Examination – Students will take a final exam during the exam period, the content of which will require integration of the material studied and critical reflections.

Evaluation

Participation	15%
Reading Responses (6 @ 2% each)	12%
Paper 1	13%
Paper 2	15%
Paper 3	20%
Final Examination	25%

 Total

100%

Resource Textbooks (available at the BU Bookstore):

- Joseph Price and Donald W. Musser, eds., *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology: Revised Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003). ISBN-13: 978-0687091126
- Kee, Albu, Lindberg, Frost, and Robert, *Christianity: A Social and Cultural History*, Second Edition. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998). ISBN-13: 978-0135780718

Primary Texts (recommended):

- Richard A. Norris, Jr., ed., *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). ISBN-13: 978-0800614119
- Augustine, *Confessions*. translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; paperback edition, Oxford World's Classics, 1998). ISBN-13: 978-0199537822
- Anselm of Canterbury, *Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm with the Proslogion*, ed. Benedicta Ward (London: Penguin, 1973). ISBN-13: 978-0140442786
- Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, ed. Mark Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008). ISBN-13: 978-0800663117

Other readings for the course are available online, on reserve at the STH library, or through Blackboard.

Course Policies

1. *Communication* – The BU Email system and BU's Blackboard 8 site serve as the official means of communication for this course and will be used to advise students of any changes in assignments or scheduling.
2. *Class Attendance* – Students are expected to be on time to plenary sessions and discussion groups. Attendance at all class sessions is also expected. Remember to turn off cell phones and pagers before entering the classroom.
3. *Inclusive Language* – Inclusive language with regard to human beings is standard in contemporary theological discourse. Students are expected to use inclusive or balanced language with regard to human beings in class discussions and in their writing, though historical texts quoted should stand in their original form. Inclusive language with regard to naming God, however, remains a controversial matter. Students should endeavor to use expansive language for God, exploring expressions that accurately reflect their own theological perspective. If questions arise regarding this policy, please consult the teaching staff.
4. *Technology* – Students are encouraged to avail themselves of technological tools to assist them in note-taking and research. However, use of such technologies during class time to check email or personal websites will not be tolerated. Please respect the learning environment for your own sake and for the sake of your fellow students and

the professors. Recordings of plenary sessions may be used for private study among students enrolled in the course but may not be circulated publicly. Discussion sections may not be recorded.

5. *Course Materials* – Copies of all materials distributed or discussed in class will be made available on Blackboard, as possible.
6. *Discussion* – Active participation is critical to doing well in this course. Participating actively means paying attention and staying engaged during plenary sessions, as well as taking seriously your responsibility to keep small-group discussions lively and focused. On the other hand, speaking up repeatedly is no substitute for making a thoughtful contribution. When expressing your point of view, be prepared to offer reasons for it (including evidence from the readings).
7. *Late Work* – Late response papers will be accepted for no more than half credit. Late papers will be penalized one grade (e.g., A to B) for each day or partial day late. Exceptions will be granted only for serious illnesses or other emergencies. In such circumstances you must notify the teaching staff of the circumstances, in advance if possible. No revisions will be accepted after the secondary due date for the first and second papers.
8. *Incompletes* – Course incompletes are not given, by STH policy, except under extraordinary circumstances. If such circumstances arise, speak to the teaching staff as soon as possible (but remember that the STH Registrar requires paperwork). Students must complete all assignments to receive a passing grade for the course.
9. *Students with Disabilities* – Any students in this course who have a disability that might prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should meet with an instructor as soon as possible to initiate disability verification and discuss accommodations that may be necessary to ensure full participation and successful completion of course requirements.
10. *Academic Code of Conduct* – The STH Academic Code of Conduct may be found [here](#). All students must understand this code, its definitions of misconduct, and its sanctions. Students should especially familiarize themselves with the section on plagiarism.

Schedule

Date	Topic	Texts
Sep 2 (Tue)	Introduction to Christian Traditions (RCN, CBB)	
Sep 4 (Thu)	Theology today and in the ancient world (RCN)	Kee et al., chs. 1-8
Sep 9 (Tue)	Early Christian Communities (CBB)	Ignatius of Antioch, <i>Epistles to the Smyrneans</i> and <i>to the Magnesians</i> , selections ; Irenaeus, <i>Against Heresies</i> 1.27, 3.1-6; Perpetua, Martyrdom
Sep 11 (Thu)	Christianity in the Roman World (CBB)	
Sep 16 (Tue)	Patristic Christian theology (RCN)	The texts in Richard A. Norris, Jr., ed., <i>The Christological Controversy</i>
Sep 18 (Thu)	Patristic Christian theology (RCN)	
Sep 23 (Tue)	Constantine and the Imperial Church (CBB)	Eusebius, History of the Church , 8.1-4, 12-13; 10.1-3, 5-9; Ambrose, Sermon against Auxentius ; Jerome, Epistle 22 to Eustochium ; Augustine, Confessions , books 1-6. Kee et al., chs. 9-11
Sep 25 (Thu)	Papacy and Monasticism (CBB)	
Sep 30 (Tue)	Augustine on Christianity, conversion, and salvation. (RCN) First Paper Due	Augustine, Confessions , books 7-13.
Oct 2 (Thu)	Augustine on God and Creation. (RCN)	
Oct 7 (Tue)	Emperors, Creeds and Councils (CBB)	Nestorius, <i>First Sermon against the Theotokos</i> , in Norris, pp. 123-131; <i>Definition of Chalcedon</i> , in Norris, pp. 157-9; Cyril of Alexandria, Third letter to Nestorius ; Pope Leo, Letter 31 to Pulcheria; Life of St. Mary the
Oct 9 (Thu)	The Eastern Church (CBB)	

		Younger , chs. 1-12, 17-20, 30-33 Kee et al., ch. 12
Oct 14 (Tue)	NO CLASS (Monday schedule)	
Oct 16 (Thu)	Early Christian mysticism (RCN)	Dionysus the Areopagite, On the Divine Names .
Oct 21 (Tue)	Christianity beyond the Empire (CBB) Revised first paper (optional) due	Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People 1.22-23, 25-27, 29-33; Xian Monument inscription ; Einhard, Life of Charlemagne
Oct 23 (Thu)	Charlemagne and Christendom (CBB)	(selections) Kee et al., chs. 13-14
Oct 28 (Tue)	Medieval Christian theology: Prayer and Proof (RCN)	Anselm, Proslogium, Meditation 11 (from the <i>Cur Deus Homo</i>), Prayer to Mary (3); Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae , Pt. I, question 2, <i>The Existence of God</i>
Oct 30 (Thu)	Medieval Christian theology (RCN)	
Nov 4 (Tue)	The Medieval Church and European Society (CBB) Second paper due.	Gregory VII, Dictatus Papae ; Urban II, Address at Clermont ;
Nov 6 (Thu)	The Quest for Nature and the Apostolic Life: the High Middle Ages (CBB)	Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermons on the Song of Songs , nos. 1, 62; Hildegard of Bingen, <i>Scivias</i> , "Declaration," and visions 2.5, 2.6, (PDF of selections available on Blackboard) Kee et al., chs. 15-16
Nov 11 (Tue)	High Medieval Christian theology: Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart (RCN)	Readings from Thomas, Summa Theologiae , Pt. 1, questions 3, 4, and 6; and Meister Eckhart, Sermons 1-4
Nov 13 (Thu)	High Medieval Christian theology: Duns Scotus and William of Ockham; Islamic and Jewish theology (RCN)	

Nov 18 (Tue)	Late Middle Ages & Renaissance (CBB). Revised second paper due (optional)	Kee et al., chs. 17-18
Nov 20 (Thu)	Luther and the Reformation in Germany (CBB)	Luther, Freedom of a Christian ; Smalcald Articles (selections); Argula von Grumbach, <i>To the University of Ingolstadt</i> , in Peter Matheson, ed., <i>Argula von Grumbach</i> ; Calvin, Ecclesiastical Ordinances
Nov 25 (Tue)	European Reformations (CBB)	Kee et al., chs. 19-20
Nov 27 (Thu)	Thanksgiving (no class)	
Dec 2 (Tue)	Luther's Theology (RCN) Third paper due	Calvin's Institutes , Book 1, chs. 1-3,, 7, 15; Book 2, chs. 1-3
Dec 4 (Thu)	Calvin's Theology (RCN)	
Dec 9 (Tue)	Christian traditions across sixteen centuries: recapitulation and review (CBB, RCN) Course Evaluations	
TBA	Final Examination	