

Syllabus for Doctrine of God
CT 251
Fall 2007
Instructor: Sarah Lancaster

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I am available to see students by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: A study of the biblical, historical and contemporary formulations of the nature and activity of ultimate reality affirmed by Christian faith as “God.”

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- 1) To examine several of the major questions concerning the doctrine of God in Christian theology
- 2) To understand various options for answering those questions
- 3) To prepare a constructive statement of the doctrine of God.
- 4) To continue to develop critical thinking skills
- 5) To continue to develop writing skills.

TEXTS:

Anselm, *Proslogion* (on reserve)

Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XI (on reserve)

Thomas Aquinas, in *Nature and Grace: Selections From the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, translated and edited by A.M. Fairweather (on reserve)

Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*

Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God*

Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is*

Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*

Steven M. Cahn, *God, Reason, and Religion*

Frederick W. Schmidt, *The Changing Face of God*

On reserve:

Gustavo Gutiérrez, “How Can God be Discussed from the Perspective of Ayacucho?” in *On the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (special issue of Concilium) (London: SCM Press, 1990)

Sarah Heaner Lancaster, “Divine Relations of the Trinity: Augustine’s Answer to Arianism”

CoursePack:

Grace M. Jantzen, “Conspicuous Sanctity and Religious Belief,” in *The Rationality of Religious Belief: Essays in Honour of Basil Mitchell*, eds. William J. Abraham and Steven W. Holtzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987): 121-140

Charles Hartshorne, “God and the Social Structure of Reality,” in *The Credibility of God (Theology in Crisis)* 19-32

- A Boyce Gibson, "Two Strands in Natural Theology," in *Process and Divinity: The Hartshorne Festschrift*, ed. William L. Reese and Eugene Freeman (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1964)
- Schubert Ogden, "Evil and Belief in God: The Distinctive Relevance of a Process Theology," in *Perkins Journal* (Summer 1978): 29-34
- _____, "On the Trinity," in *Theology* 83 (1980): 97-102
- Roger Haight, "The Point of Trinitarian Theology," in *Toronto Journal of Theology* 4 (Fall 1988): 191-204
- William Hasker, "The Problem of Evil in Process Theism and Classical free Will Theism" and subsequent exchange with David Ray Griffin, in *Process Studies* 29:2 (2000): 194-236
- Josiah Young, "Exodus as a Paradigm for the Black Theology," in *Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm*, 93-99.
- Eddie Hicklin, Jr., "The Other Side of God," in *A.M.E. Zion Quarterly Review* 108:4 (October 1996): 10-1
- Julie Shoshana Pfau and David R. Blumenthal, "The Violence of God: Dialogic Fragments," in *Cross Currents* 51 (Summer 2001): 177-200
- Tyron Inbody, "The Power of Prayer and the Mystery of Evil," in *Anglican Theological Review* 81:1 (Winter 1999): 61-81

ASSIGNMENTS:

Each student will be required to do the following:

Identify issues for discussion based on the reading to be brought to each class. This list of issues is ungraded but required.

Write two papers four- to five-pages in length.

Write one paper ten pages in length.

Attend class regularly.

The two short assignments for this course require you to do extended interpretation of some texts we have read and then to reflect briefly on what you have understood from them. You should formulate a question that identifies an issue in the reading we have done for class that you want to work on. This assignment should be done in such a way that you are focused on the reading itself, not on a general question. For instance, you should not ask simply, "What does the Bible reveal about God?" Such a question commits you to proposing a constructive statement about that issue, and you are not likely to be able to do so successfully at this stage of your education. Instead, you might ask "How does Williams understand the Bible to reveal God?" or "Do Williams and Jantzen agree in their understanding of what revelation is?" Your primary job is to interpret the readings well. As you conclude your paper, though, you should offer your own critical assessment of what you have discovered in the reading. Working closely with these readings will help you formulate your own ideas about this issue, but you are learning to think with them about an issue that is important to you rather than bearing the full responsibility of proposing an answer yourself.

These short papers help prepare you for the final paper, which is quite different. You have had two opportunities to test out ideas and see what you think about them. In the

final paper, you must present your own understanding of God, without relying simply on what others have said. Instructions for this assignment are on another sheet.

GRADING:

Short papers: 25% each (total of 50%)

Long paper: 40%

Class participation: 10%

Grades will be reduced if ungraded assignments are not turned in, if graded papers are late, or if attendance is irregular.

SCHEDULE:

August 29: Our Biblical Heritage

September 4: The Classical Conception of God

Reading: Anselm's *Proslogion*, and Augustine's Confessions, Book XI, and Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica*, questions 2-4, 20-23 (on reserve)

September 11: The Neoclassical Conception of God

Reading: Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, chapters 1-2 and "God and the Social Construction of Reality" (CoursePack); A. Boyce Gibson, "Two Strands in Natural Theology" in *Process and Divinity* (CoursePack)

September 18: No class

September 25: Experience and Knowledge of God

Reading: Ogden, "The Reality of God" and "The Strange Witness of Unbelief" in *The Reality of God*; Steven M. Cahn, *God, Reason, and Religion*

October 2: Religious Language

Reading: Ogden, "Myth and Truth" in *The Reality of God*; Johnson, *She Who Is*, part I, chapters 1-3 (I recommend that you read the entry on "myth" written by Schubert Ogden in the *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*)

First short paper due.

October 9: Recess

October 16: Revelation

Reading: Williams, "Trinity and Revelation"; Johnson, part II, chapters 4-6; Jantzen, "Conspicuous Sanctity and Religious Belief" (CoursePack)

October 23: The God of Jesus Christ

Reading: Williams, ch. 5-8 ("On Being Creatures," "Beginning with the Incarnation," "The Finality of Christ," "Word and Spirit")

October 30: The God of Jesus Christ (cont.)

Reading: Johnson, part III, chapters 7-9; Ogden, "What Does It Mean to Affirm, 'Jesus Christ Is Lord'?" in *The Reality of God*

November 6: The Trinity

Reading: Lancaster, "Divine Relations of the Trinity: Augustine's Answer to Arianism" (on reserve); Johnson, part IV, chapters 10-11; Roger Haight, "The Point of Trinitarian Theology" (CoursePack); Schubert Ogden, "On the Trinity" (CoursePack)

November 13: The Problem of Evil

Reading: Johnson, part IV, chapter 12; Gustavo Gutiérrez, "How Can God Be Discussed from the Perspective of Ayacucho?" (on reserve), Eddie Hicklin, Jr., "The Other Side of God" (CoursePack); Josiah Young, "Exodus as a Paradigm for the Black Theology" (CoursePack); Julie Shoshana Pfau and David R. Blumenthal, "The Violence of God: Dialogic Fragments" (CoursePack)

Second short paper due.

November 20: Thanksgiving break

November 27: The Problem of Evil, cont.

Reading: Hartshorne, chapters 3-4; Ogden, "Evil and Belief in God: The Distinctive Relevance of a 'Process Theology'" (CoursePack); Hasker, "The Problem of Evil in Process Theism and Classical Free Will Theism" and subsequent exchange with Griffin (CoursePack); Tyron Inbody, "The Power of Prayer and the Mystery of Evil" (CoursePack)

December 4: Current Questions

Reading: Schmidt, *The Changing Face of God*

Come prepared to share with others what you have done so far on your constructive statements for criticism and suggestions.

December 11: Constructive Statements

Final paper due.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE:

I expect language regarding human beings to be inclusive of women and men. If, for instance, you intend to refer to human beings as such, I expect to read "humankind" instead of "mankind." I encourage language about God to be inclusive.