



Contemporary Theology 1

From Hegel to Death of God Theologies

Syllabus

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Course Description

For good or for bad, philosophy has played a pivotal role in the development of theology and culture. In this course, learners examine the major trends in contemporary theological thought in light of their philosophical contexts. The course begins with a review of the major developments in Western thought prior to Hegel, and then explores the theologies of Hegel, Kierkegaard, Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich. The course culminates in the “Death of God” theologies of Paul Van Buren and Thomas Altizer. The course enables learners to evaluate contemporary, non-evangelical theologies and to recognize their impact on everyday life.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Know the major trends in contemporary, non-evangelical thought.
2. Understand the presuppositions (philosophical and otherwise) that generate such modern theologies.
3. Recognize and defend against such views.
4. Better comprehend orthodox positions through analysis of errant views.
5. Apply Old Testament theology to life and ministry.

Course Texts

The following texts are required reading (or possible alternates to the requirements **); specific reading assignments are listed with each lecture. Some of these are out of print (indicated by OP), but are necessary due to the nature of the course. The code LIB suggests that the student borrow the book from a library; the code BUY suggests that the student may borrow the book, but might find purchasing the book worthwhile. Various editions of the primary sources may be used, as may appropriate substitutions for secondary literature that becomes unavailable. The course is up to date on this matter as of Summer 1999.

OP: Altizer, Thomas J. J. *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966.

LIB: Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. 4 vols. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-1962.



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BUY: Bretall, Robert, ed. *A Kierkegaard Anthology*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951; reprint, 1973.

LIB: Bultmann, Rudolf. *Jesus Christ and Mythology*. New York: Scribner, 1958; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1981.

OP: Collins, James. *The Existentialists*. Chicago: Regnery, 1952.

** : Ford, David F., ed. *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.

OP: Gilkey, Langdon. *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language*. Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969.

LIB: Grayling, A. C. *Wittgenstein*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

** : Grenz, Stanley J. and Roger E. Olson. *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1992.

BUY: Kierkegaard, Soren. *Fear and Trembling*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1986.

LIB: _____. *Philosophical Fragments*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985.

BUY: Lowrie, Walter. *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965.

LIB: Taylor, Charles. *Hegel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

LIB: Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. in 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

OP: Van Buren, Paul. *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*. New York: Macmillan, 1963.

LIB: Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1922.

LIB: _____. *Philosophical Investigations*. 3rd ed. Paramus, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

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COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Whether you sit in a traditional classroom or study from a distance, you will benefit from interaction, collaboration, and spiritual formation (ATS schools, note Standards 3.2.1.3; 10,3,3,3; 10.3.4.3). In order to meet this need in distance theological education, ITS is developing structures and resources to encourage spiritual formation and community interaction in our courses. In this course, we have included three collaborative learning features:

1. ITS Online Interactivity Forum (see course requirements) – fosters peer-to-peer interaction in a global, threaded discussion (required for all students)
2. Spiritual Formation Project (see course requirements) – fosters mentor-to-learner interaction in a mentor-guided reflection, discussion and application (required for all students)
3. Learning Community Assignments (see end of syllabus) – fosters peer-to-peer collaboration in a group approach to assignments (optional but recommended where possible)

Go to www.ITScourses.org/interactivity/ for the most up-to-date ITS resources.

Course Requirements

1. **Time:** You are expected to spend a minimum of 120 hours in this course for 3 semester/4 quarter hours of graduate credit.
2. **Listening/Learning Guide:** Listen carefully to the 24 lectures of recorded material by Dr. Feinberg and keep in mind the questions and the intended outcomes listed in the Learning Guide. Completion of the Learning Guide constitutes a portion of the course grade (see below).
3. **Collateral reading:** In addition to the required readings listed with study questions below, read an additional **500 pages**. It is assumed that not more than 200 pages of what you read in preparation to write your research paper (see description below) can be used to satisfy this collateral reading assignment. You are encouraged to use the bibliography in the study guide and to read from the primary literature, though further reading in secondary sources is also acceptable. Please be sure to submit a report to the supervisor of this course as to what you have read to satisfy this 500-page requirement.
4. **Research Paper**

Write a **15-20 page** (double-spaced) paper on some aspect of contemporary theology involving the theologians and movements covered in this course. The following are suggestions, but are not meant to limit your options:



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- (a) Compare and contrast two thinkers on a given topic (e.g., you might compare and contrast Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Tillich on their understanding of Christ and the role this doctrine plays in their overall theology/philosophy);
- (b) Analyze some concept/doctrine in a modern thinker and compare and contrast it to traditional orthodox understanding of the doctrine (e.g., Barth and orthodoxy on Scripture; Kierkegaard and orthodox soteriology on saving faith; Bultmannian hermeneutics vs. the evangelical commitment to literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutics);
- (c) Expound and explain a particularly difficult concept of one writer or difficult portion of his work and evaluate it (e.g., Kierkegaard's concept of truth as subjectivity or his understanding of the relation of faith and reason; the later Wittgenstein on doubting, explaining, and certainty; Kierkegaard's comparison of Idealism [especially Hegelian Idealism] and Christianity and his critique of the former in *Philosophical Fragments*);
- (d) Take a theme and trace its development throughout the period (or a portion thereof) we are studying (e.g., the concept of God; the concept of faith; the meaningfulness of religious language).

As noted, these are only suggestive of the direction you may take. It should be obvious, however, that whatever topic you choose, you should not merely repeat course lecture material. Your own creativity and analysis are expected.

Recommended guidelines for the paper are those set forth in the latest edition of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers for Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

5. ITS Online Interactivity Forum

Participate with other students worldwide in an ongoing asynchronous threaded discussion of **two** major course topics. Go to www.ITScourses.org/interactivity/ to register for and enter the ITS On-Line Forum. In order to get the fullest benefit from the Forum, complete the assignment **after** you have listened to **all** the lectures. Be sure to return to the forum after finishing the course to see how others respond. Follow these steps to complete the assignment:

- ◆ Post an original answer to each question for your course (75 word min.).
- ◆ Post your response to any previous answer given to each question (75 word min.).
- ◆ Submit a document to your proctor that contains the original questions, your postings, and the postings to which you responded.

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NOTE: Please read the “Assignment Instructions” in the Forum for details.

Objective: to develop critical thinking skills through personal interaction with the content of the course and the responses of others within a diverse community of learners.

6. Spiritual Formation Project

RATIONALE: Ministry preparation and the Christian life require more than academic exercises. Learners also need personal, spiritual formation, which involves theological reflection and critical thinking on their current practices and assumptions. This process occurs as learners engage in self-reflection and interaction in a community of learning. **With this in mind**, ITS includes in all courses a capstone project addressing these issues and facilitating interaction beyond the formal learning environment (ATS schools, note Standards 3.2.1.3; 4.1.1; 10.3.3.3).

Write a **five-to-six page reflective essay** and **interview a mentor**, discussing the spiritual impact of this course on your life. *Identify your mentor early in the course*, and submit the essay to your grader when you take the final exam. This last project should not be a summary of course content, but an application of course principles. Complete the following:

1. **Personal Reflection and Evaluation: *Reflect on the course*** – To integrate your academic studies with your walk of faith, reflect on the content of the course and evaluate your life in light of what you learned.
 - a. Follow these steps in your reflection:
 - Step 1: What **one** theme, principle, or concept in the course is the most significant to you personally? Why is it significant?
 - Step 2: What portion(s) of the course brought this theme/principle/concept to light?
 - Step 3: Think about your past. Why is it vital now for you to deal with and apply this theme/principle/concept?
 - Step 4: How should this affect your thoughts and actions, and what *specific steps* should you take to *concretely* apply what you have learned?
 - b. Write your answers to the above questions in full paragraph form. (Recommended length for this reflection: **approximately three pages**)
 - c. Give a copy of this reflection to your mentor (see #2).



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2. Community Reflection and Interaction: *Interview a mentor* – Since the Holy Spirit uses the input of others to guide and form His people, interview a mentor according to the following guidelines:

a. Who should you interview? (1-3 are required; 4-6 are recommended)

1. Someone with whom you have a reasonably close relationship.
2. Someone who is a mature Christian ministry leader (i.e. a pastor).
3. Someone who is **not** your grader or a family member.
4. Someone who values the spiritual formation process.
5. Someone who is familiar with and values the subject of the course.
6. Someone who has experience using the content of the course in ministry.

NOTE: ***Identify your mentor early in the course***, and give him/her the page entitled “Guidelines for Mentors.”

b. Focus of the interview – Your interview should focus on the issues and questions you raise in your essay. For example:

- ◆ What feedback can your mentor give in response to your essay?
- ◆ In light of the course content, are the conclusions you made appropriate? Why or why not?
- ◆ What additional advice, deeper insights or broader applications might he/she suggest from his/her own life and ministry?

NOTE: Conduct this interview either in person (preferred) or over the phone. Do **not** use electronic communication (i.e. email, instant messenger, etc). Suggested length: 45 minutes.

3. Synthesis and Application: *Draw your final conclusions* – Having reflected on the course and the discussion with your mentor, synthesize what you have learned in these three sections:

a. Section 1: Begin your essay with the personal reflection from #1 above. This should be exactly what you gave your mentor for the interview.

b. Section 2: Comment on your interview, explaining what you discussed and the insights you gained from your mentor. Include the following:

- ◆ What were the mentor’s comments regarding your essay?
- ◆ What advice did he/she give?



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- ♦ How did his/her comments expand or correct your application of the course?
 - ♦ Include the person's name, occupation, and the length of the interview.
- c. **Section 3:** Conclude with a synthesis of what you have learned. Answer the following:
- ♦ If your mentor corrected any thoughts in your "Personal Reflection and Evaluation", how do you feel about these corrections? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
 - ♦ Synthesizing your thoughts from section one and your mentor's insight in section two, what final conclusions have you reached? How is this different from section one?
 - ♦ In light of the interview and further reflection, what additional, *specific* changes need to occur in your life and what *concrete* steps will you take to implement them?

NOTE TO STUDENTS: Your effort in this assignment will determine its benefit. If by the end of this course you have not yet reflected critically on your life in light of what you have studied, allow this assignment to guide you in that process. The instructor for this course will not score your essay based on the amount of spiritual fruit you describe; so do not exaggerate (or trivialize) what you have learned. **The primary grading criteria is that you have thoughtfully considered the principles of the course and realistically sought to apply them to your life.** If you have done this and met the minimal requirements (as noted above), you will earn the full points for this assignment.

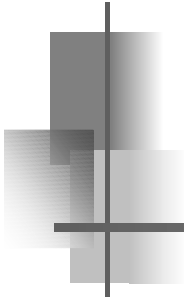
Note on confidentiality: Perhaps the Holy Spirit is dealing with you in some very personal areas of your life. Because of this, your grader will keep your essay entirely confidential and either return or discard it.

Objective: to stimulate reflection and interaction on course principles in order to enhance personal spiritual formation.

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7. Final Examination

A final exam will be offered at the conclusion of the course. It will test your mastery of the lecture material. Insofar as the lecture material interacts with your required reading, that reading is fair game for the test. However, *make your focus the lecture material*. The test will be essay in nature and will test your understanding of the various thinkers and movements covered in the course. You will be tested not only on how well you understand each thinker on his own terms, but also on how well you can relate the thinking of the different theologians to one another. Study



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questions in the Learning Guide should help you prepare for the exam, though you will also need to be able to relate the ideas of one thinker to another and understand the development of individual themes throughout the period.

Course Grades

Learning Guide / Required Reading	15%
Research Paper	35%
ITS Online Interactivity Forum	5%
Spiritual Formation Project	10%
Final Exam	35%

NOTE: Please submit a written statement telling how much of the required reading you have completed, listing the specific works (and number of pages) you have read to satisfy the collateral reading assignment. Accompanying this statement should be your answers to the questions in the Learning Guide.



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Notes Regarding This Downloaded Syllabus

This downloadable syllabus is not exhaustive. It is designed to provide learners with a picture of the course, not a full outline of the course. Grader Guidelines, Appendixes, Bibliographies, Lecture Outlines, and Review Questions have been removed. The complete course syllabus is included with purchase of the course in either a digital or hard-copy format.

Likewise, individuals taking the class for credit are responsible for the syllabus requirements of the specific institution through which the course is offered. Each individual institution has reserved the right to alter or change the syllabus as deemed necessary.