



TH 6301 Introduction to Theology

Mondays 1–3:40

Instructor: Stephen D. Lawson

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Office Hours: Wednesdays: 10–Noon, 1–2 and by appt.

I view it as my responsibility to be available and responsive to you. I aim to respond to all emails within 24 hours (weekends excluded) and am willing to set up meeting times with you to talk in person.

“O Lord God, You move us to delight in praising You; for You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”

– St. Augustine of Hippo

Note bene: Anything on this syllabus can change at the professor’s discretion in order to accommodate the needs of the professor and/or the students. Any changes will be communicated via email, Canvas announcement, or in-class notice. In some cases, a revised syllabus may be posted on Canvas.

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to introduce the nature, tasks and language of Christian theology in the life of the church. We will examine the nature of revealed knowledge and the basic content of the Christian tradition passed down through the Scriptures and expounded by the church through the ages. We will give special attention to central Christian teachings including: the Trinity, Christology, Pneumatology, the doctrine of Creation, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology.

Learning Objectives

1. To impart a baseline of foundational theological content. Students will *demonstrate an active grasp* of foundational doctrines of the Christian tradition.
2. Reading theologically. Students will *interpret* within a theological framework both primary and secondary theological writings.
3. Writing theologically. Students will *accurately summarize* basic theological concepts in their own words, explain relationships between two or more theological concepts, and identify the historical and/or contemporary relevance of these concepts.
4. Speaking theologically. Students will *ask questions* relevant to the course content and contribute meaningfully to class discussion.

Course Textbooks

- Beth Felker Jones, *Practicing Christian Doctrine: An Introduction to Thinking and Living Theologically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014) [PCD in course schedule]
- Mark A. McIntosh, *Divine Teaching: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007) [DT in course schedule]
- Rupert Shortt, *God is No Thing: Coherent Christianity* (London: Hurst, 2016)
- Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007)
- Additional Readings posted on the Canvas site

Course Assignments

- **Class participation:** Students are expected to complete all required readings and to come to class ready to discuss the texts. Students’ engagement with the course readings will be assessed through participation in class discussion as well as through reading responses submitted online.
- **Reading Journal (250 points; 50% of grade):** Students will create a reading journal in which they will summarize primary sources from the course readings and analyze them through disciplined questioning.
 - Précis & Discussion Questions
 - A précis is a concise and accurate summary of a given text. Quotations from the text should be employed sparingly. Please consult the document “Guide for Writing Good Summaries” on the Canvas site before writing your first précis.
 - For every reading assignment each student will write a brief précis followed by 1–3 discussion questions. Each précis should be between 150 and 350 words (longer readings should have longer précis). Write them (single-spaced) on a single document. Follow each précis by the discussion questions. Students should upload their précis and discussion questions as a .docx file to the Canvas site by 11:59PM on the Sunday before class.
 - Discussion questions generally fall into three types of questions:
 - Questions that ask for explanation, due to the reader not understanding certain passages in the text (please note if any vocabulary was unfamiliar or confusing for you and I will try to address it in class)
 - Questions that arise from the text making a point that would seem to contradict an earlier text, or a discussion in class
 - Questions that ask “so what,” and want to know the implications of certain claims, and what difference it would make if they were true
- **Précis of Rupert Shortt’s *God is No Thing* (25 points; 5% of grade):** Students will read Rupert Shortt’s *God is No Thing* and then write a 1.5–2 page (*single spaced*) summary of the text. This is a précis only, just summarize his argument. Conclude this paper with 1–3 discussion questions based on your reading of the text. *Due via Canvas Upload 11:59PM September 8.*
- **Integrative Book Review (100 points; 20% of grade):** Students will read and critically review *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* by Rowan Williams. In their review students will put the course content and readings into dialogue with Williams. More detailed instructions for this assignment will be posted on the website. *Due via Canvas Upload 11:59PM December 1.*
- **Nicene Creed (25 points; 5% of grade):** Students will memorize the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and recite it before the professor. It is the student’s job to schedule a time with the professor (ideally before or after class or during office hours). A translation of the creed is printed on pages xii–xiii in *Tokens of Trust*. If you would like to use a different translation, please send it to the professor beforehand. This assignment should be completed before *October 7.*
- **Final Exam (100 points; 20% of grade):** There will be a comprehensive final exam consisting of both objective questions (multiple choice, matching, etc.) and writing questions (short answer, essay).

Date	Theme	Journal Readings	Other assignments
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Aug 26	Course Introduction Syllabus Orientating questions		
Sep 2	Labor Day (no class)		
Sep 9	God and Metaphysics		<i>God is No Thing</i> précis (due 9/8)
Sep 16	Theological Method	DT, 3–30 PCD, 1–29 Behr, “What Are We Doing, Talking about God?” Barth, “The Word of God and the Task of Theology” Young, “ <i>Theologia</i> in the Early Church” Gregory of Nazianzus, <i>Oration 27</i>	
Sep 23	Theology & the Bible: Toward a Theology of Scripture	PCD, 31–53 DT, 31–54 Hull, “The Bible Only?” Henri de Lubac, “Spiritual Understanding” Bonaventure, “Prologue” from <i>The Breviloquium</i>	
Sep 30	Salvation	DT, 55–110 PCD, 141–165 Gregory of Nyssa, <i>Catechetical Oration</i> (excerpt)	
Oct 7	Doctrine of God	Gregory of Nazianzus, <i>Oration 28</i> Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i> (excerpt) Origen, <i>On First Principles</i> (excerpt) Herbert McCabe, “Prayer”	Creed Due
Oct 14	Trinity	DT, 111–178 PCD, 55–76 Augustine, <i>On the Trinity</i> (excerpt)	
Oct 21	Christology	PCD, 117–140 Athanasius, <i>Against the Arians</i> (excerpt) Herbert McCabe, “The Involvement of God”	
Oct 28	Pneumatology	PCD, 167–191 Basil, <i>On the Holy Spirit</i> (excerpt)	
Nov 4	Creation and Anthropology	DT, 179–228 PCD, 77–116 Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> (excerpt)	
Nov 11	Ecclesiology	PCD, 193–216 Cyprian of Carthage, <i>On the Unity of the Church</i> (excerpt) Gregory of Nyssa <i>Catechetical Oration</i>	

		(selection) Kenneson, "Gathering: Worship, Imagination, Formation" Hauerwas, "The Church as God's New Language"	
Nov 18	Flex day	TBD	
Nov 25	Eschatology	PCD, 217-240 Gregory of Nyssa, <i>On the Soul and Resurrection</i> (excerpt) George MacDonald, <i>The Consuming Fire</i> Rutledge, "Condemned into Redemption"	
Dec 2	Summary and Review		Williams Review (due 12/1)
Dec 9	Final Exam		

Recommended books for additional study

Barth, Karl. *Dogmatics in Outline*. Translated by G. T. Thomson. New York: Harper and Row, 1959.

Hart, David Bentley. *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

———. *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Williams, Rowan. *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*. Harrisburg: Morehouse, 1982.

———. *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.

———. *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.

———. *Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.