**REL 212: Christian Theologies**

**Spring 2018**

**Instructor Information:**

Dr. Sarah Ruble

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Office Hours: T/W 10:30-11:30

**Course Description:**

This course introduces students to central debates and developments in the history of Christianity. It explores how various Christians have engaged significant questions about God, humanity, and the whole creation. The course also examines complex relationships between Christianity and other religious and philosophical traditions. The course emphasizes the close reading and discussion of primary texts written by classical and contemporary theologians from a variety of Christian traditions and perspectives.

**Course Goals**

1. To introduce students to some of the major developments in the history of Christianity and to central themes and questions of Christian theology and practice.
2. To read theological texts closely and to think critically about them.
3. To give students the opportunity to learn more about their own religious and philosophical convictions and questions and to help them be consciously critical about their own values and philosophical or theological commitments as they evaluate various theological arguments regarding major issues of Christian faith and life.
4. To learn how to contribute more creatively and constructively to public debates about religious and ethical issues.

**By doing the work for the course and actively participating in the discussions, students have the opportunity to:**

1. Learn more about Christian theology, the history of Christianity, and various forms of Christianity worldwide.
2. Learn better how to read carefully and to think critically
3. Reflect more intentionally on one’s own religious or philosophical identity, values, and commitments.
4. Write and speak more clearly and persuasively.

This course is a THEOL course, which means that is has the following student learning outcomes:

1. Students will demonstrate a basic understanding of selected historical, contemporary, and emerging expressions of the Christian faith.
2. Students will evidence an awareness of critical textual interpretations of the Bible, including the historical contexts in which it was written.
3. Students will be able to articulate a basic understanding of the nature of religious language and symbolism.
4. Students will be able to recognize and articulate the religious and theological dimensions of cultural, political, and intellectual issues.
5. Students will demonstrate a basic understanding of critical interpretations of religious claims.
6. Students will think critically about their own religious experience.

**Required Books and Readings**

These books are available for purchase at the BookMark

Augustine, *Confesssions* (trans. Boulding).

Luther, *Freedom of a Christian* (trans. Tranvik).

Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited.*

Bible (various translations can work—I prefer the NRSV, CEB, or New American)

*The Christian Theological Tradition 3rd Edition* (Cory and Hollerich)

All other readings are on Moodle. You need to bring the Moodle readings to class.

**Class Format and Expectations**

This course will include both lectures and discussions. Much of our work will focus on our common readings and setting those readings in a larger historical and theological context. Thus, your attendance and careful preparation are crucial for the success of the course. I expect you to complete the assigned readings before you come to class (although I do not expect you understand everything in them). I also expect you to contribute thoughtfully to class discussions. Please note: thoughtful contributions are not the same as right answers. Learning demands taking intellectual risks and trying new ideas. Our discussions will be enhanced as we help each other think through new and difficult ideas and as we respectfully engage ideas with which we disagree.

Learning happens best with limited distractions. I expect you to be on time (and you can expect me to dismiss you on time). Please turn off all cell phones any other devices that turn attention from the task at hand. If you need to be accessible for reasons of child or elder care, please consult with me.

Your written work should be typed and double-spaced. Please use Times New Roman 12 point font (yes, I know what Courier New does to a page count) and one-inch margins. Any written work should be written in formal prose and should observe conventional English grammar rules.

This classroom is a technology free zone. Research shows that handwritten notes help you better retain information than typed-notes; having a computer leads to distraction for yourself and others. **If bringing the readings in hard copy is a significant financial burden, please talk to me about options.**

**Assignments and Grading:**

1. Participation (10%): This class depends upon your attendance and engagement. Both you and I will evaluate your participation. Of course, to participate, you must be present. You are allowed three absences for any reason. All absences after those three will lower your final grade two percentage points. I suggest, therefore, that you reserve your absences for actual emergencies such as illness and appointments. If you have an extended illness or a family emergency, please speak with me as soon as possible.

I also expect you to be on time to class. I know that emergencies occasionally arise. If you absolutely must come late, please enter unobtrusively as possible. If you are more than 10 minutes late, it will count as an absence. Repeated tardiness will result in a lowered grade.

We will attend the Gustavus Seder on Wednesday, March 28 from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.. That counts as one of the required days of class and is part of the absence policy.

Finally, I reserve the right to institute reading quizzes or the like if I get the sense that people are not doing the reading. Those would be added to your participation grade.

1. Church Analysis Project (30%): You will write a theological analysis of a congregation. There will be more details in the assignment handout.
2. Book Reviews (30%--10% each): For each of the long works we read, you will write a 2-3 page “Letter to a Reader” outlining the main argument or point of the work, the work’s implications, and your evaluation of it. You will, in sum, be helping someone new to the text understand it better. You will be able to revise the letters.
3. Two tests (30%--15% each): These will be take home essays and will cover material from class and from *The Christian Theological Tradition*.

**Policy on Late Work:**

I could tell you that you have to turn things on time in my class because “in the real world” you will have to turn things in on time, but the reality is that sometimes in the real world you have to turn things in on time and sometimes you don’t. Much depends on what you are turning in and to whom. In this class, you are turning work in to me and I, among other things, make work due on certain dates so I can turn your work around within two weeks without putting myself in the position of needing to grade an entire course worth of papers in two to three days (believe me, you don’t want to be the 14th paper I read on a given day). Given that, my policy on late work is as follows:

1. You will lose a third of a letter grade for every day (including weekend days) that work is late.
2. If I allow late work to be revised (a decision I would make based on the assignment and how late it is, among other factors), the late penalty will still apply.
3. I do not accept late revisions.
4. If you turn work in late, you must submit it to me both via Moodle and via email (depending on when you turn it in, I might have already downloaded the papers from Moodle).
5. If you work is more than two weeks late, you will receive a zero (I give myself a two week turn around time for work. Once those weeks are passed, I’m done grading that assignment).
6. Getting your work in is your responsibility. I’m absolutely here to help you with work, but I am not here to hound you for your work.

**Disability Services:**

Gustavus Adolphus College is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or you think you may have a disability of any nature) and, as a result, need reasonable academic accommodation to participate in class, take tests or benefit from the College’s services, then you should speak with the Disability Services staff, for a confidential discussion of your needs and appropriate plans. Course requirements cannot be waived, but reasonable accommodations may be provided based on disability documentation and course outcomes. Accommodations cannot be made retroactively; therefore, to maximize your academic success at Gustavus, please contact Disability Services as early as possible. Disability Services (<https://gustavus.edu/advising/disability/>) is located in the Academic Support Center. Disability Services Coordinator, Kelly Karstad, ([kkarstad@gustavus.edu](mailto:kkarstad@gustavus.edu)or x7138), can provide further information.

**Help for Multilingual Students:**

Support for English learners and multilingual students is available through the Academic Support Center’s Multilingual Learner Tutor (<https://gustavus.edu/advising/>). The MLL tutor can meet individually with students for tutoring in writing, consulting about academic tasks, and helping students connect with the College’s support systems. When requested, the MLL tutor can consult with faculty regarding effective classroom strategies for English learners and multilingual students. If requested, the MLL tutor can provide students with a letter to a professor that explains and supports appropriate academic arrangements (e.g., additional time on tests, additional revisions for papers). Professors make decisions based on those recommendations at their own discretion. In addition, English learners and multilingual students can seek help from peer tutors in the Writing Center (<https://gustavus.edu/writingcenter/>).

**Academic Integrity:**

As Gustavus students, you have signed the following honor code: “As a community of scholars, the faculty and students of Gustavus Adolphus College have formulated an academic honesty policy and honor code system, which is printed in the Academic Bulletin and the Gustavus Guide. As a student at Gustavus Adolphus College I agree to uphold the honor code. This means that I will abide by the academic honesty policy, and abide by decisions of the joint student/faculty Honor Board.”

A first offence will result in a zero for the assignment and may also result in failing the course. A second instance of academic dishonesty will result in failing the course. All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Provost’s Office.

Plagiarism is a common form of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism involves using someone else’s words and/or ideas without giving that person credit. All of the following are examples of plagiarism:

* 1. Turning in another student’s work as your own.
  2. Cutting and pasting any sections of text from another student’s work, an internet source, or a published source into your work without marking that text as a quotation and citing it properly.
  3. Using another author’s words or ideas without attribution in the text, even if you list that author in a bibliography.
  4. Changing only one or two words in a sentence that another author wrote, even if you footnote that author.

Claiming another person’s words or ideas as your own (whether by omission or commission) constitutes both theft and lying. Remember that in college, your professors are not only concerned with your ability to find good information but also with your ability to think well. Cutting and pasting someone else’s words tells us nothing about your ability to think and, in fact, indicates that you have decided not to. Changing one word in a sentence does not indicate whether you truly understand the information. Presenting yourself as someone who has birthed an idea or made information understandable when you have not is dishonest.

If you have questions about what you need to cite, how to summarize or how to quote, please ask me. Ignorance (“I didn’t know that was plagiarism”) is not a viable defense against a charge of plagiarism at the college level.

In my experience, most students commit plagiarism for one of two reasons. First, because they panic about an assignment. You can avoid the panic by working ahead. Second, because they do not understand the material. You can get help with the material by, again, working ahead and asking for help. Remember: a bad grade or even a late assignment is better than committing an act that will result in (at a minimum) failing an assignment and starting a record of your academic dishonesty in the Associate Provost’s Office.

**Closing Note**

A final note. Please feel free to discuss any issues pertaining to this class—personal or academic—with me. That is what I am here for. And I look forward to getting to know each of you throughout the semester.

**Schedule**

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| Date | Topic | Reading |
| February 13 | Introduction and Why Study Theology |  |
| February 15 | God’s Covenant with Israel | Genesis 1-25  *CTT* Chapter 3 |
| February 20 | God’s Call for Justice | Amos  *CCT* Chapter 4 |
| February 22 | The Jesus Narrative | Luke  *CCT* Chapter 6 |
| February 27 | Visions of Jesus | Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*  Book Review Due by 8:00 a.m. on Moodle |
| March 1 | Israel and the Church | Acts |
| March 6 | Paul | Galatians  Dunn, “New Perspective” |
| March 8 | Project | Watch Video (details in class) |
| March 13 | Heresy and Authority | Irenaeus, “Perversion of the Heretics,” “The Apostolic Faith,” “God is Both Creator and Father,” and “Priority of the Apostolic Tradition”  Origen, “The Apostolic Doctrine,” and “How to Interpret Scripture”  Gregory of Nyssa, Excerpts from *The Life of Moses*  *CCT* Chapter 8 |
| March 15 | Trinity I | Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* Chpts 1-5 |
| March 20 | God as Trinity Part II | Athanasius Cont.  *CCT* Chapter 9 |
| March 22 | Augustine | Augustine, *Confessions,* Books 1-9  Book Review Due by 8:00 a.m. on Moodle |
| March 27 | Augustine | *Confessions* cont.  *CCT* Chapter 10 |
| March 28 | Attend Gustavus Seder 6 p.m.-9 p.m. | |
| March 29 | Review |  |
| April 3 | Mid-Term Due by Noon on Moodle | |
| April 10 | Project Day | Bring copies of thesis and evidence |
| April 12 | Encounter with Islam and the Question of “Other” Faiths | “A Common Word”  Wells, “Other Fold”  *CCT* Chapter 12 |
| April 17 | Medieval Theology and Atonement | Anselm, excerpts from *Cur Deus Homo?*  Abelard, “God’s Love and Redemption”  *CCT* Chapter 13 |
| April 19 | Aquinas on Theism | Aquinas, Readings On the Existence of God  *CCT* Chapter 15 |
| April 24 | Aquinas on Grace | Aquinas, Readings on Nature and Grace  *CCT* Chapter 14 |
| April 26 | Mysticism | Julian of Norwich, Excerpts from *Revelations of Divine Love*  *CCT* Chapter 16 |
| May 1 | Luther | Luther, *Freedom of a Christian*  Book Review Due on Moodle by 8:30 a.m. |
| May 3 | Calvin and Providence | Calvin, Excerpts from *Institutes of the Christian Religion*  Hart, “Tsunami and Theodicy”  *CCT* Chapter 19 |
| May 8 | Sacraments and the Reformation | Communion Services  McGrath, “Sacraments”  *CCT* Chapter 20 |
| May 10 | Colonizing Theologies | De las Casas, Various Exceprts  Jennings, “Overcoming Racial Faith”  *CCT* Chapter 21 |
| May 15 | Contextual Theologies | Orobator, Excerpts from *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*  *CCT* Chapter 25 |
| May 17 | Liberals and Conservatives | *CCT* 22 |
| May 22 | Review and Wrap-Up |  |

**Appendix**

**I am a Mandatory Reporter**

Title IX is federal legislation that makes clear that violence and harassment based on sex or gender are civil rights violations. Gustavus Adolphus College takes incidents of sexual misconduct and sexual harassment seriously.

College employees, including instructors, have mandatory reporting responsibilities regarding acts of sex and/or gender discrimination, including sexual violence; I am required to share information with the Title IX coordinator. You may speak to someone confidentially by contacting the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART/CADA), Chaplains, Counseling Center, or Health Service staff; conversations with these individuals can be kept strictly confidential. SART/CADA can be reached 24 hours a day at 507-933-6868.

 The college will respect the confidentiality of the victim and alleged offender(s) as much as possible consistent with the College’s legal obligations. **Students also always have a choice as to whether to participate in an investigation or not.**