

RS2610 – Christian Thought, Culture, and Practice
HURON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
Western University
M/W/F @ 12:30-1:20pm
Classroom: W103



PROFESSOR

Dr. Michael R. Wagenman (PhD, University of Bristol)
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To set up a meeting, either approach the professor immediately before or after class or arrange an appointment by email/phone.

HUC COURSE DESCRIPTION

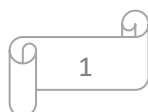
A survey of Christian thought, culture, and practice, including approaches to the Bible, the formation of doctrine, the development of ethics, the use of philosophy, iconographic expression, and the sacraments. Attention will be given to a variety of historical and cultural contexts, as represented both in local and global settings.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This is an *introductory* theology course. To *introduce* academic theology, this course focusses on the skill of *thinking theologically*. What is theological thought? How is theological thought unique from other forms of thought? How does one utilize theological thought to reflect on life, historically or contemporarily? These are the fundamental questions we will return to again and again in this course.

Theological thought is grounded on two assumptions which will form the basis for this course. First, theological thought is capable of reflecting on *anything*. In other words, it is a skill which is comprehensive in scope. To highlight this, the student will notice that the subject material of the assigned readings cover a wide range of topics (ecology, socio-economics, politics, nationalism, etc.). Theological thought isn't only for "religious" or "spiritual" topics. During the course, the student will come to understand why this is so as well as what makes theological thought uniquely *theological*.

The second assumption is that theological thought is engaged in through *dialogue*. Theological thought is a communal enterprise that progresses through the generous and hospitable back-and-forth nature of genuine discussion with others. This course has a seminar (as opposed to lecture) format. Students will need to come to class prepared. *Being prepared* means having read the assigned material *at least twice* prior to discussing it in class (the syllabus lays this out clearly – class periods are cancelled to give students a chance to read an assigned text in whole and then specific pages are assigned for re-reading prior to class time when they will be discussed). And, having read the material, the student will come to class with some initial ideas formulated which will be shared along with others' contributions. In the end, the *process* of thinking theologically will be the course goal rather than coming to some *position* on the material in question. This means that class time will be as lively as the students make it. The role of the professor will be to foster, guide, coach, referee, and moderate our theological discussion. The course exams will give each student the opportunity to summarize their theological formulations.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES/GOALS

- The student will be introduced to the skill of theological thought and be given the opportunity to practice it through dialogue with others about a diversity of topics.
- The student will be exposed to the theological thought of others (assigned course readings, professor, student peers, etc.) and develop their own “voice” in response. Developing one’s “voice” incorporates the skills, habits, and virtues of generosity, patience, hospitality, humility, clarity, logic, and courage. These skills are relevant to both the acts of listening to others and speaking for one’s self.
- The student will critically reflect on forms of Christian thought presented in the course readings as well as on the shape of Christian thought the students themselves bring to the course readings and discussions. Another way of saying this is that this course offers the student the opportunity to reflect on their own (explicit or implicit, systematic or unorganized) faith (Christian or other).
- The student will learn to compare and contrast the thought of others with their own thought and reflect on the similarities and differences between them – and what this might mean for one’s life, vocation/career, etc.
- The student will reflect on how ethics arises from theological thought, how theological thought results in concrete action in the world, and how one’s ethical response to theological thought shapes one’s future (alone and in community).
- Despite this course’s focus on theological *thought*, the student will gain an appreciation for the *embodied* nature of Christian theology which takes it beyond rationalism into communal forms of (ortho)praxis (worship, liturgy, habit, lifestyle, etc.).
- The student will gain an introductory exposure to how different Christian traditions approach the task of theological thought in unique ways.

ASSIGNED COURSE READINGS

- Benjamin Myers, *The Apostles Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018). [112pp]
- David Bentley Hart, *The Doors of the Sea: Where was God in the Tsunami?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005). [109pp]
- Abraham Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, ed./tr. James W. Skillen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991). [94pp]
- William Stringfellow, *The Politics of Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984). [90pp]
- Douglas John Hall, *The Canada Crisis: A Christian Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2018). [122pp]
- Any additional readings handed out in class, emailed to students, or posted to OWL.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Class Participation (25%):** This is a seminar-format course, based on active student discussion in class. This can’t happen without class attendance and preparation. Students must be *present* in class, come to class *prepared*, and actively *participate* in class discussion. Any absence from class must be excused (a doctor’s note). Students will have completed the assigned readings for the day and be fully engaged in the discussion and other activities during the class time.

2. **“Thinking Theologically” Assignment (5%):** Students will receive specific instructions for this assignment during the first week of class. It will involve attending a regularly-scheduled church worship service on Sunday, January 13 (there is no class on Friday, January 11 as compensation).
3. **Two Midterm Examinations (2x20%=40%):** As indicated in the course schedule, two fifty-minute written examinations will take place during the course. The examinations will only cover material immediately preceding the exam (they will **not** be cumulative). The midterm examinations will be essay format and will incorporate both objective knowledge and subjective reflection on the material. They are designed to assist students in focussing their thoughts rather than inducing anxiety. If a student has read the course material as scheduled, participated in the class discussions, the exams will not require undue preparation and should not provoke unnecessary stress (of the garden variety). That is, the mid-term examinations give the student the opportunity to reflect critically on their learning so far in the course.
4. **Final Examination (30%):** A written comprehensive final examination will take place on material assigned, presented, and covered throughout the entire course. The exam will take place as scheduled by the registrar. It will be designed to be completed within approximately two hours of the three hour examination block of time. The student must achieve a passing mark on the final examination in order to receive a passing course mark. Any student with a 90+ course mark prior to the final examination is not required to write the final examination.

COURSE GRADE CALCULATION

- 25% - Class Participation
- 5% - “Thinking Theologically” Assignment
- 20% - Midterm Examination, part 1 (February 15)
- 20% - Midterm Examination, part 2 (March 22)
- 30% - Comprehensive Final Exam (Date TBA)

COURSE GRADING SCALE AND LEVEL OF WORK

A+	90-100%	Exceptional
A	85-89%	
A-	80-84%	
B+	77-79%	Good
B	73-76%	
B-	70-72%	
C+	67-69%	Satisfactory
C	63-66%	
C-	60-62%	
D+	57-59%	Unsatisfactory
D	53-56%	
D-	50-52%	
F	0-49%	Failure

COURSE SCHEDULE

<u>Date</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
Monday, January 7	Course begins...	Read Syllabus
Wednesday, January 9	"What does it mean to think <i>theologically</i> ?"	
Friday, January 11	No Class – "Thinking Theologically" Assignment	TT Assignment
Monday, January 14	"Thinking Theologically" Assignment Discussion	
Wednesday, January 16	No class	Read Myers
Friday, January 18	Discuss Myers, i-8	Myers, i-8
Monday, January 21	Discuss Myers, 9-36	Myers, 9-36
Wednesday, January 23	Discuss Myers, 37-98	Myers, 37-98
Friday, January 25	Discuss Myers, 99-136	Myers, 99-136
Monday, January 28	"The Apostles' Creed and <i>theological</i> thought"	
Wednesday, January 30	No class	Read Hart
Friday, February 1	Discuss Hart, i-44	Hart, i-44
Monday, February 4	Discuss Hart, i-44	
Wednesday, February 6	Discuss Hart, 45-109	Hart, 45-109
Friday, February 8	Discuss Hart, 45-109	
Monday, February 11	"Hart, human experience, & theological thought"	
Wednesday, February 13	Midterm Examination Review Day	
Friday, February 15	Midterm Examination 1	
February 18-22	No class – Reading Week	Read Kuyper
Monday, February 25	Discuss Kuyper, 1-34	Kuyper, 1-34
Wednesday, February 27	Discuss Kuyper, 35-42	Kuyper 35-42
Friday, March 1	Discuss Kuyper, 43-58	Kuyper, 43-58
Monday, March 4	Discuss Kuyper, 59-79	Kuyper, 59-79
Wednesday, March 6	"Kuyper and theological <i>social</i> thought"	
Friday, March 8	No class	Read Stringfellow
Monday, March 11	Discuss Stringfellow, 1-28	Stringfellow, 1-28
Wednesday, March 13	Discuss Stringfellow, 29-46	Stringfellow, 29-46
Friday, March 15	Discuss Stringfellow, 47-68	Stringfellow, 47-68
Monday, March 18	Discuss Stringfellow, 69-90	Stringfellow, 69-90
Wednesday, March 20	Midterm Examination Review Day	
Friday, March 22	Midterm Examination 2	
Monday, March 25	No class	Read Hall
Wednesday, March 27	Discuss Hall, 1-30	Hall, 1-30
Friday, March 29	Discuss Hall, 31-68	Hall, 31-68
Monday, April 1	Discuss Hall, 69-102	Hall, 69-102
Wednesday, April 3	Discuss Hall, 103-118	Hall, 103-118
Friday, April 5	"Hall and thinking theologically about Canada"	
Monday, April 8	Course and Final Examination Review Day	

Additional Statements:

1. **Statement on Use of Electronic Devices during Tests and Exams:** It is not appropriate to use technology (such as, but not limited, to laptops, PDAs, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and is distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.
2. **Statement on Academic Offences:** Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site:
<http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2014/pg113.html>.
3. **Plagiarism-detecting Software/Computer Marking:** All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).
4. **Support Services:**
 - UWO Registrar's Office: <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>
 - Huron's Faculty of Theology, Office of the Dean: http://www.huronuc.on.ca/faculty_of_theology/info_for_current_students
 - Faculty of Theology office: srice@uwo.ca, 519-438-7224, ext. 289
 - Bachelor's Academic Advising at Huron: <http://www.huronuc.ca/CurrentStudents/AcademicAdvisorsandServices>
 - Huron's Writing Skills Centre: http://www.huronuc.on.ca/student_life/writing_services
 - UWO's Mental Health website: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to this website for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.
 - UWO Student Support and Development Services: http://communications.uwo.ca/current_students/student_services.htm
 - Services provided by Western University Student Council: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>
5. **Accommodation for absences:** If documentation is required for either medical or non-medical academic accommodation, then such documentation must be submitted by the student directly to the Faculty's Dean's office (or academic counselor), and not to the instructor. For the Faculty of Theology, all such documentation must be submitted to room A227. It will be the Dean's office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.
 - a. **Non-medical absences:** Assignments which are submitted late without prior permission of the instructor are subject to a 10% deduction per day; assignments submitted more than 5 days late without prior permission will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Should a non-medical reason make it impossible for you to write the final course exam, appropriate documentation and a request for relief must be submitted to the Dean's Office well in advance of the exam date.
 - b. **Medical absences:** See also the Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness — Undergraduate Students, at <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medical.pdf>

- c. For work representing 10% or more of the overall grade for the course, a student must present documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet his/her academic responsibilities. Documentation must be submitted as soon as possible to your Faculty Dean's office (Huron Arts & Social Science students should take their documentation to the Academic Counsellor, through the Academic Services Centre at Huron), together with a Request for Relief specifying the nature of the accommodation requested. The request and documentation will be assessed and appropriate accommodation will be determined by the Dean's office in consultation with the instructor(s). Academic accommodation will be granted ONLY where the documentation indicates that the onset, duration and severity of the illness are such that the student could not reasonably be expected to complete his/her academic responsibilities.
- d. The UWO Student Medical Certificate (SMC) and Request for Relief are available at the Student Centre website (<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>), Huron University College Academic Counselling website (www.huronuc.on.ca) or from the Dean's Office or Academic Services Centre at Huron.