

1-1-2008

## PH 701 Faith, Reason, and Christian Belief

Kevin Paul Kinghorn

Follow this and additional works at: <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/syllabi>

---

### Recommended Citation

Kinghorn, Kevin Paul, "PH 701 Faith, Reason, and Christian Belief" (2008). *Syllabi*. Book 50.  
<http://place.asburyseminary.edu/syllabi/50>

This Document is brought to you for free and open access by the eCommons at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syllabi by an authorized administrator of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. For more information, please contact [thad.horner@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:thad.horner@asburyseminary.edu).

# PH 701 SYLLABUS

## Faith, Reason, and Christian Belief

Summer (1) 2008

Instructor: Kevin Kinghorn

"I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Corinthians. 9:22)

A prayer for us: Heavenly Father, you know the struggles and questions faced by those around us and by those with whom we will come in contact in the future in the course of our ministries. Help prepare us now for some of the questions with which others will come to us. Help us to learn now what we will need to know to help remove obstacles that keep others from embracing the gospel. And help us through our studies to gain for ourselves a better understanding of the faith we already have in you as our Lord and Savior. Amen.

### I. WELCOME FROM KEVIN KINGHORN

Welcome! I'm so glad you decided to register for Faith, Reason, and Christian Belief this semester. Well, I suppose it's actually for a *week*, not a semester. ☺ I should emphasize up front that the bulk of the work for this class—all the readings and 1 of the 2 assignments—will take place *before* our week of actual meetings. But more about this later when we discuss the "Course Schedule".

The majority of classes I teach in my role as a professor within Asbury's philosophy department are ExL courses. But I always have, and always will, love the face-to-face interaction of physical classrooms, and I very much look forward to our time together! When I'm not teaching intensive courses like this one at one of Asbury's campuses, I live most of the year in Oxford, England, where I still do some part-time teaching at Wycliffe Hall (one of the colleges that comprise Oxford University).

I've had a keen interest for a number of years in the relationship between faith and reason. Historically, this relationship has been a primary topic of discussion and debate within the Christian tradition. And for good reason! For this topic certainly has important implications for such tasks as apologetics, evangelistic preaching, and the deepening of our own Christian beliefs and commitments. I'm excited to think what we might learn from our time together in this class as we seek through this study to become more effective ambassadors for our Lord Jesus Christ.

## II. COURSE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Broadly speaking, our goal will be to become more effective ministers for the kingdom of God. Part of one's being an effective minister clearly includes being on firm ground oneself as to what one believes. One of the goals for our studies within PH701 will be to gain insight into the extent to which we can, and should, use reason to gain a deeper personal understanding of the God we embrace.

Another part of effective ministry for the kingdom involves being able to address the concerns of those in the modern world who do not embrace Jesus Christ as Lord. This involves understanding the extent to which we can, and should, appeal to reason in offering a Christian apologetic to non-Christians that makes sense to them. One of our goals this semester will be to gain a deeper understanding of the *kind* of answer we as Christians are called to provide as we seek to fulfil the Biblical imperative to provide "an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1Peter 3:15).

Given that Asbury is a seminary in the Wesleyan tradition, we will also keep an eye toward better understanding how our own Christian background (predominantly, I presume, as Wesleyans) fits into the larger Christian tradition. Such understanding will better allow us to distinguish a non-Christian perspective from a Christian, non-Wesleyan perspective. And this is an important distinction to be able to make whenever we come across a theological idea that seems a bit foreign to us.

More specifically, there are a number of course and learning objectives for PH 701:

- (1) We will examine the various meanings of the term 'reason' as it is used by those both within and outside the Christian tradition.
- (2) We will trace the ways in which the Church Fathers and Medieval Christian writers used reason to articulate the Christian faith.
- (3) We will look at the range of optimism and pessimism that theologians/philosophers from the Reformation through the modern era have had as to whether reason can lead us to Christian moral truths.
- (4) We will learn why some Christian thinkers (e.g., Aquinas) thought that reason *must not* determine Christian truths, and why other Christian thinkers (e.g., Kierkegaard) thought that reason *cannot* determine Christian truths.
- (5) We will examine the proposal from 'Reformed epistemologists' (e.g., Alvin Plantinga) that reason *need not* be used to arrive at Christian beliefs.
- (6) We will explore the question of what control we have over our beliefs, and whether it is actually possible to voluntarily *choose* what one believes.

- (7) We will examine perspectives on the question of whether, and under what conditions, we can rightly be held morally responsible for what we believe.
- (8) We will explore the extent to which 'beliefs' are a part of virtuous Christian 'faith'.
- (9) We will construct our own detailed answers to the question of what exactly one *decides to do* when one decides to exercise faith in God.

### III. REQUIRED TEXTS

- (1) *Faith and Reason (Oxford Readers)*, Paul Helm, ed. (Oxford University Press, 1999) ISBN: 0192892908.
- (2) *The Decision of Faith*, Kevin Kinghorn. (T & T Clark, 2005) ISBN: 0567030687.
- (3) Reading Packet (available through Asbury Bookstore)

These books can be ordered from Asbury's bookstore, which you can call (859) 858-4242 or e-mail at [exlbooks@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:exlbooks@asburyseminary.edu).

Again, let me emphasize that all the readings (and the first assignment) are due at the *beginning* of our week of class together. So, it will obviously be necessary to have your reading materials in hand early enough for you to complete this work ahead of time.

### IV. COURSE SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

The most obvious place to begin here is with the question: "How are we going to fit an entire 3-credit class into the space of a week?!" The answer to this question comes in two parts. First, as far as the *readings* are concerned, all the required readings will need to be completed before the week of intensive classes begins. Second, as far as the *graded assignments* are concerned, one assignment will need to be completed before the beginning of the week of classes, and one final assignment will be due two weeks after classes end. The initial assignment is due on Monday morning at the beginning of the first class session (June 9), and it comprises 1/3 of the final grade for the course. The second assignment will be due on Friday

(June 27), two weeks after our final day of class, and will comprise 2/3 of the final grade. **The assignments are listed below in blue.**

The course is structured under three general headings, as listed below. The accompanying **list of required readings** for the course are given in **bold** print. (Readings should be read in sequential order as listed below.) The accompanying **assignments** are given in **blue** print. Again, there are **two main assignments** for this class.

## A. Historical Overview of the Role of Reason in Religious Enquiry

1. Classical Greek Thought  
**Helm, articles 1-12**
2. Reactions among the Church Fathers  
**Helm, articles 13-24, 26**
3. Medieval Period  
**Helm, articles 27, 30, 32-35, 37, 38**
4. Renaissance and Reformation  
**Helm, articles 41-45, 47-52**
5. 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century  
**Helm, articles 54-55, 57-59, 62-63**
6. 19<sup>th</sup> Century  
**Helm, articles 68-72, 75**
7. 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Science and Religion  
**Helm, articles 79, 81-87**
8. 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Realism and Religion  
**Helm, articles 90-94, 96-99**

**ASSIGNMENT (TO BE HANDED IN BY STUDENTS AT 8:30 A.M. June 2,  
FIRST DAY OF CLASS):**

**Corresponding with each of the above 8 sections, answer the following eight questions. Answers for each question should be 1-2 paragraphs in length, so that the entire assignment should be completed in approximately 5-7 double-spaced pages.**

1. **Can Aristotle's idea of an 'Unmoved Mover' be reconciled with the Christian God who creates *ex nihilo*?**

2. With reference to one or more of the Church Fathers, which reactions to Classical Greek philosophy strike you as important for Christians to emphasize.
3. Explain very briefly whether the following Medieval writers seem to view reason as helping to *arrive* at theistic belief or whether they view reason as helping to explore the theistic beliefs one *already has*.
 

-Anselm	
-Peter Lombard	-Bonaventure
-Thomas Aquinas	-Duns Scotus
4. To what extent, and why, are the following writers confident that human reason can lead us to moral truths about God?
 

-Erasmus	-Pierre Bayle
-Luther	-Nathaniel Culverwel
-Calvin	-John Owen
5. (preliminary note: ‘Empiricism’ is the thesis that all human learning begins with our experiences of the world through our five senses. By contrast, a ‘Rationalist’ approach uses arguments that do not rely on empirical observations.) Are the following writers, in their theological arguments, better categorized as Empiricists or Rationalists?
 

-Descartes	
-Spinoza	-Hume
-Locke	-Kant
-Paley	-Schleiermacher
6. How do the following writers explain the existence of religious beliefs?
 

-Feuerbach	-Freud
-Marx	-Durkheim
7. Prior to Darwin, the teleological argument for God’s existence typically took the form of Paley’s ‘watch analogy’ (essay #58). By contrast, the writers in this section are writing in a post-Darwin era. How would you characterize the way the form of the debate surrounding the teleological argument has changed from the pre-Darwin to the post-Darwin era?
8. Do the critiques of religious language offered by ‘logical positivists’ such as Ayer and Flew contain any points that Christians should accept?

## B. The Relation of Reason to Belief

1. Should reason be used to arrive at Christian Belief?  
 Case studies: Kant, Aquinas, Barth, Kierkegaard
  - Online readings from Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, I, 2, 2; II-II, 5, 3  
 available at: <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1002.htm> (article 2)  
<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3005.htm> (article 3)
  - Helm, articles 100, 101
  - Reading Packet : Adams, “Kierkegaard’s Arguments Against Objective...”
  - Kinghorn, section 5.2 (pp. 95-102)

2. The Ethics of Belief
  - Helm, articles 73, 74, 105, 106
3. Reformed Epistemology: Belief with No Evidence
  - Helm, article 108
  - Kinghorn, section 5.1 (pp. 89-95)
4. Culpability for Belief
  - Online readings from Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, II-II, 5, 2  
available at: <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1002.htm> (article 2)
  - RP: Adams, “Involuntary Sins”; Adams, “The Virtue of Faith”; excerpt  
from Swinburne’s *Responsibility and Atonement*
  - Kinghorn: Introduction; chpts. 1& 2; pp.102-6; chpt. 6.

### C. The Relation of Belief to Faith

1. πίστις and the history of the word ‘believe’
  - RP: excerpt from Smith, *Faith and Belief*
2. The act of ‘putting one’s faith in God’
  - Helm, article 56
  - RP: excerpt from Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*
  - Kinghorn, chpt. 3.
3. Substitutes for ‘belief’ in the act of faith?
  - RP: Adams, “The Leap of Faith”; excerpt from Pojman, *Religious Belief and the Will*; Alston, “Belief, Acceptance and Religious Faith”
  - Kinghorn, chpt. 4.
4. Some implications
  - Kinghorn, chpt. 8

**ASSIGNMENT (TO BE EMAILED TO ME AT: [kevin\\_kinghorn@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:kevin_kinghorn@asburyseminary.edu) BY MIDNIGHT, June 27):**

**Write a paper on one of these two topics:**

**EITHER...**

**(1) For which of our beliefs can God rightly hold us morally responsible?**

**OR...**

**(2) What does one decide to do when one decides to ‘exercise faith’ in God?**

**The paper should be approximately 4,000 words in length (which usually works out to 12-15 pages double-spaced). A word count of 4,500 is the maximum for the paper; and a word count below 3,000 will almost surely be marked down as being too thin an analysis.**

**NOTES ON THE READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS:**

As you work through the material, here are a few notes to keep in mind.

► As you read through the Helm book, before you begin a new section within the book, make sure you read the corresponding question within the first assignment (listed above). In other words, work on the first assignment *as* you're reading through the Helm articles. This will make completing the first assignment much easier.

► The Helm book is designed to give readers a *very broad* overview of some of the various historical approaches to questions related to faith and reason. Do not worry if you don't understand everything that all the authors are saying! Instead, the purpose of this initial, historical section of the course is to give you a rough idea of the contrasting general approaches to faith and reason. So, it's the general approaches—rather than all the specifics of each author's writings—that we'll try to take away from this section of the course.

► The writings of Aquinas are organized in a peculiar (and downright confusing!) manner; and you'll need to know about this beforehand. His enormous work, *Summa Theologia*, is organized into 4 main volumes/parts; then within each volume/part there are a number of questions; and then within each question there are several articles. Hopefully, the weblinks I provided above will take you to the correct places. When looking at each "Article" Aquinas writes, you'll need to know how he arranges his comments. First, Aquinas mentions 3 or 4 points/objections that argue for what he ultimately *doesn't* want to conclude. After these 3-4 points, Aquinas says, "On the other hand..." and then Aquinas goes on to give *his own* view, which begins "I answer that..." or "Reply:..." After his own reply to the issue at hand, he then offers a rebuttal to each of the 3-4 points/objections he started with. (I told you it was peculiar and downright confusing!) One final note, in the Helm book, *some* of the essays from Aquinas are not from the *Summa Theologia*, but from an earlier work of his called the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. This earlier work doesn't follow the same peculiar structure; and the numbers in the *Contra Gentiles* are simply paragraph numbers and don't signify anything else.

► A small point that also might spare confusion: The first assigned sections of my book are taken from chapter 5; and in that chapter I refer to something discussed earlier in the book called a "*belief<sub>m</sub>*". A *belief<sub>m</sub>* is simply a 'belief that some particular message comes from God'. Also, although I've divided up the readings within my book nonsequentially—so as to fit with the order of topics in the overall class—, if you'd rather just read the book sequentially by itself [Introduction and chapters 1-8 (omitting chapter 7)] then feel free to do so.

► While you won't want to actually write your final paper before the beginning of classes, it would be beneficial to begin thinking about what you'd like to write on before classes begin. That way, when we have our class time together, you can ask questions and get feedback on issues you are thinking through as you plan your paper. After the final day of classes, you will have two weeks to complete your final paper. This task is feasible in two weeks, but only if you have some of the thinking/research ahead of time. Thus, in order to write a good paper

in two weeks, you'll need to have completed all the readings before classes begin, and you'll need to be thinking through and organizing issues during our week of class so that you can get straight on to the paper once the week of classes is over.

▶ As you read through the assigned readings in the last two general sections of the course (sections B and C), it is useful to keep in mind the two paper topics/questions that you are to choose from in writing your final paper. I would strongly recommend you take notes on the readings where you see that some idea is potentially relevant to your final paper. This way, you will be doing much of your research for the final paper as you read through the assigned material.

▶ Please bring your required readings to class with you, as we'll refer to them (especially the Helm book).

▶ Finally, if you have any questions at all, please do feel free to email me at:  
kevin\_kinghorn@asburyseminary.edu

Every Blessing,  
Kevin