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PH 501 Philosophy of the Christian Religion

Laurence W. Wood

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PH 501

PHILOSOPHY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

(Saturday Only)

Sept 11; 25; Oct. 9; 23; Nov. 6

9:00 – 12:00, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

*Dr. Larry Wood, Professor
Asbury Theological Seminary*

“Life without inquiry is not worth living.”—Socrates

“An Idea, to be suggestive, must come to the individual with the force of a revelation”—William James

*“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than is dreamt of in your philosophy”—
Shakespeare’s Hamlet”*

*“The man who cannot wonder . . . is but a pair of spectacles behind which there is no eye.”—Thomas
Carlyle*

“Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies.”—Friedrich Nietzsche

“Ignorance never settles a question.” --Benjamin Disraeli

*“My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; if any one’s will is to do his will, he shall know whether my
teaching is from God.” --Jesus*

PURPOSE

- To introduce the student to the general study of philosophy of the Christian religion;
- To acquaint the student with the nature of philosophical method;
- To investigate the overlap between the concerns of Christian theology and those of general philosophy;
- To provide a critical assessment of the relation between the Christian understanding of reality and that of alternate ways of perceiving it;
- To encourage the student to develop an appreciation for ideas and to recognize how ideas shape the human community.

REQUIRED READING

1. *The Great Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse (New York: New American Library, 1990)
2. Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howrad V. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1974).
3. Michael Peterson, et al, *Reason and Religious Belief*, Second edition (Oxford University press, 1998).
4. Laurence W. Wood, "The Miracle of Atheism," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 47.2 (Fall 1992): 43-78. Library Reserve Shelf.
5. L. Wood, "An Evangelical Eschatological Panentheism" *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue*, ed. Bryan Stone and Tom Oord (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1999, projected).
6. L. Wood, "From Barth's Trinitarian Christology to Moltmann's Trinitarian Pneumatology," *The Asbury Theological Journal* (Spring 1993). (Library Reserve Shelf).

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

- There will be no formal tests, but each student will write short essays (5 pages maximum for each of the 5 essays) on a variety of assigned topics. Students may work together on these essays, producing a single group essay for each assignment. Or, a student may choose to work alone. Students who produce a single group project must identify the other members of the group, and each student must sign a statement that s/he/ contributed significantly to the writing of each essay. Some students may choose to consult other students for only one or more essays, and this method will also require identifying all those that participated in the composition of the essay(s). In no instance is it permitted for one to have another person to write one's essay without one's own input and thought. Each essay must also reflect the student's own efforts even though s/he may be consulting with others in its composition. Composing a socialized essay assumes that collaborative learning significantly enhances one's understanding, and hence it is encouraged.
- Class attendance is required. Learning is more than acquiring factual information contained in texts, though that arduous task is absolutely essential. Learning is more than rote memory. Learning involves "thinking out loud" and engaging in conversation. Attending class provides a dialogical context for listening and participating in the meaning of ideas.

CLASS FORMAT

- Each class will consist mostly of lectures.
- Students will be placed in team groups of four persons. Each group will meet on each class day from 3:00 – 3:30 p.m. to discuss some of the study questions that are at the end of each chapter in *Reason and Religious Belief*. A team captain will be selected for each class day. It will be the responsibility of the team captain to decide which questions are to be discussed by the group, apportioning the amount of time equally among the chapters assigned for that particular day. The team captain will moderate the group discussion, takes notes, and then report back at 3:30 P.M. for the plenary session from 3:30 – 4:00. This process allows students the opportunity to seek clarification for lingering and unanswered questions, especially as they prepare for writing the assigned essays.

Class Schedule

SEPTEMBER 11, 1999

“Introduction”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 1-6
“Thinking about God: The Search for the Ultimate”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 7-17
“Socrates and/or Jesus?”	<i>The Apology</i> , and <i>The Phaedo</i> , in <i>The Great Dialogues of Plato</i> Kierkegaard, <i>Philosophical Fragments</i> , pp. 1-45).
Group Discussion Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compare the Socratic method with the Christian concept of revelation. Are they compatible? 2. Do you agree with Socrates: “Life without inquiry is not worth living”? 3. Does the concept of history have any “decisive significance” for Socrates?
Essay: “Some Similarities and Differences between Socrates and Jesus as Religious Leaders”	DUE DATE: October 30, 1999

SEPTEMBER 25, 1999

“Religious Experience: What Does It mean to Encounter the Divine?”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 18-42
“Faith and Reason: How Are These Related?”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 43-61
“The Divine Attributes: What Is God Like?”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 62-84. L. Wood, “From Barth’s Trinitarian Christology to Moltmann’s Trinitarian Pneumatology,” <i>The Asbury Theological Journal</i> (Spring 1993). (Library Reserve Shelf).
Essay: “How Christians Know that God is Trinitarian: The Roles of Faith, Experience, and Reason”	DUE DATE: October 30, 1999

OCTOBER 9, 1999

“Theistic Arguments: Is There Evidence for God’s Existence?”	Laurence W. Wood, “The Miracle of Atheism,” <i>The Asbury Theological Journal</i> 47.2 (Fall 1992): 43-78. Library Reserve Shelf; <i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 85-115
“The Problem of Evil: The Case Against God’s Existence”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 116-145
“Knowing God Without Arguments: Does Theism Need A Basis?”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 146-165.
Essay: “The Philosophical Arguments for God’s Existence—A Personal Critique”	DUE DATE: October 30, 1999

OCTOBER 23, 1999

“Religious Language: How Can We Speak Meaningfully About God”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 166-189
“Miracles: Does God Intervene in Earthly Affairs?”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 190-211

“Life After Death: Are There Reasons for Hope?”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 212-236
“Religion and Science: Compatible or Incompatible?”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 237-258
Essay: “How Talk about God, Divine Intervention, and Life Everlasting Is Meaningful in a Scientific Age”	DUE DATE: December 10, 1999

NOVEMBER 6, 1999

“Religious Diversity: How Can We Understand Differences among Religions?”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 259-278
“Religious Ethics: The Relation of God to Morality”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 279-301
“Philosophy and Theological Doctrine: Can Philosophy Illumine Religious Belief?”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 302-321
“The Continuing Quest: God and The Human Venture”	<i>Reason and Religious Belief</i> , pp. 324-332
Essay: “What to Believe And How to Behave—Is the Christian Religion Preferred?”	DUE DATE: December 10, 1999

