

1-1-2008

# PH 501 Philosophy of Christian Religion

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## Recommended Citation

Okello, Joseph B. Onyango, "PH 501 Philosophy of Christian Religion" (2008). *Syllabi*. Book 1799.  
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**PH 501: Introduction to Philosophy of Religion**  
**ExL Course**  
**Summer I 2008**  
**Instructor: Joseph B. O. Okello**

### **Introductory Remarks**

Greetings! It is a great honor to know that you will be taking this course. Think of it as a philosophical journey, in which you will have an opportunity to explore some fundamental issues in the area of Philosophy of Religion.

A downside to the electronic method of learning is the fact that it can be quite depersonalized. This need not be the case in this course. In the first week's module you will find a forum where you will post an introduction about yourself. In this way, we can gain better knowledge of each other, and hopefully, form a community of believers desiring to love God with all our minds.

### **Course Description**

Pursues these objectives: a survey of the philosophical method; a study of the mutual impact of the Christian faith and philosophical discourse upon each other; a reflection upon the overlap between Christian and philosophical ethics; and a critical assessment of the relationship between the Christian understanding of reality and other ways of perceiving it.

### **General Learning Objectives**

What we are aiming at here is not only a firm establishment in the philosophy of our theology, but also a clear articulation of the reasons for the hope we have in us. But most importantly, we aim at developing a deeper and personal relationship with God through the act of loving Him with all our minds.

### **Specific Course Objectives**

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Explain the different accounts of human freedom found within the Christian tradition.
2. Explain your understanding of the attributes of God, and their implications for your life.
3. Articulate the different traditional arguments for the existence of God.
4. Provide your understanding of the relationship between reason and the Christian faith.
5. Provide an epistemological justification for holding religious beliefs.
6. Provide arguments for and against examined religious experiences, and give philosophical justification for the Christian vantage point.

7. Explain what miracles are in light of the naturalistic objection to miracles, and provide justification for the Christian position.
8. Explain the key issues surrounding the problem of evil in light of God's existence.
9. Explain the basic issues surrounding the dispute between science and religion.
10. Demonstrate how finite human language can be used in describing an infinite God.
11. Explain the Mind-Body problem, and how this problem bears on personal identity.
12. Articulate a Theological-cum-Philosophical account of the exclusive claims of Christianity in light of those who have never heard the Gospel.

## **Required Course Texts**

1. Hasker, William. *Metaphysics*. Downer's Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983.
2. Peterson, Michael, ed. *Reason and Religious Belief, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
3. Peterson, Michael, ed. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*. New York. Oxford University Press, 2006.

These books can be ordered from Asbury Seminary's Bookstore. The toll-free telephone number is 1-866-855-8252.

## **Course Schedule**

This course will have seven modules. Each module has two lessons. And each lesson will have one assignment. The due dates for the required reading are also given. Also, I will post complete module assignments in the course information center at least two weeks prior to assignment due dates. These assignments will involve study questions to guide you through the reading, and enable you to flesh out the claims of different authors.

### **MONDAY JUNE 02 2008**

#### **Lesson 01: Introducing Philosophy of Religion**

Reading Assignment:

1. Hasker's *Metaphysics*: Chapter 1
2. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 1

### **TUESDAY JUNE 03 2008**

#### **Lesson 02: Freedom and Responsibility**

Reading Assignment:

1. Hasker's *Metaphysics*: Chapter 2

### **WEDNESDAY JUNE 04 2008**

#### **Lesson 03: God's Attributes**

Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 4
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Four)

- a. Hick: God's necessary Existence
- b. Maimonides: Negative Theology
- c. Aquinas: God is omnipotent
- d. Mavrodes: Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence
- e. Pike: Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action
- f. Boethius: God is Timeless
- g. Wolterstorff: God is Everlasting

**THURSDAY JUNE 05 2008:**

**Lesson 04: Arguments for the Existence of God**

Reading Assignment:

- 1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 5
- 2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Five)
  - a. Anselm: Classical Ontological Argument
  - b. Gaunilo: Critique of Anselm's Argument
  - c. Plantinga: A Contemporary Version of the Ontological Argument
  - d. Aquinas: Classical Cosmological Argument
  - e. Craig: The Kalam Cosmological Argument
  - f. Mackie: Critique of the Cosmological Argument
  - g. Paley: The Analogical Teleological Argument

**FRIDAY JUNE 06 2008:**

**Forum/Class Discussion Day**

**MONDAY JUNE 09 2008**

**Lesson 05: Faith and Reason**

Reading Assignment:

- 1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 3
- 2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Three)
  - a. Aquinas: The Harmony of Reason and Revelation
  - b. Pascal: The Wager
  - c. Clifford: The Ethics of Belief
  - d. James: The Will to Believe
  - e. Kierkegaard: Truth is Subjectivity
  - f. Evans: Critical Dialog in Philosophy of Religion

**TUESDAY JUNE 10 2008:**

**Lesson 06: Knowing God without Arguments**

Reading Assignment:

- 1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 6
- 2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Six)
  - a. Plantinga: The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology
  - b. Pargetter: Experience, Proper Basicity, and Belief in God
  - c. Hasker: The Case of the Intellectually Sophisticated Theist

**WEDNESDAY JUNE 11 2008**

**Lesson 07: Religious Experience:**

Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 2
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Two)
  - a. Saint Teresa: Religious Experiences
  - b. James: Religious Experience as the Root of Religion
  - c. Alston: Religious Experience as Perception of God
  - d. Proudfoot: Religious Experience as Interpretative Accounts
  - e. Martin: Critique of Religious Experience

**THURSDAY JUNE 12 2008**

**Lesson 08: Miracles**

Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 9
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Ten)
  - a. Hume: The Evidence for Miracles is Weak
  - b. Swinburne: Miracles and Historical Evidence
  - c. Mackie: Miracles and Testimony

**FRIDAY JUNE 13 2008**

**Forum/Classroom Discussion Day**

**MONDAY JUNE 16 2008**

**Lesson 09: The Problem of Evil**

Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 7
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Seven)
  - a. Augustine: Evil is Privation of Good
  - b. Hume: Evil Makes a Strong Case Against God's Existence
  - c. Mackie: Evil and Omnipotence
  - d. Plantinga: The Free Will Defense
  - e. Hick: Soul-Making Theodicy

**TUESDAY JUNE 17 2008:**

**Catching Up With Your Reading**

**WEDNESDAY JUNE 18 2008**

**Lesson 10: Science and Religion**

Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 12
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Twelve)
  - a. Gould: Two Separate Domains
  - b. Dawkins: Science Discredits Religion
  - c. Murphy: Theology and Scientific Methodology

**THURSDAY JUNE 19 2008**

**Lesson 11: Religious Language**

Reading Assignment:

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 11
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Nine)
  - a. Aquinas: The Doctrine of Analogy
  - b. Flew and Mitchell: The Falsification Debate
  - c. Tillich: Religious Language as Symbolic
  - d. Alston: Speaking Literally of God

**FRIDAY JUNE 20 2008**

**Forum/Classroom Discussion**

**MONDAY JUNE 23 2008**

**Lesson 12: Mind-Body Issues**

Reading Assignment:

1. Hasker's *Metaphysics*: Chapter 3
2. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 10
3. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Eleven)
  - a. Price: The Soul survives and functions after death
  - b. Swinburne: The Soul Needs a Brain to Continue to Function
  - c. Badham: Problems with Accounts of Life after Death
  - d. Hick: Resurrection of the Person

**TUESDAY JUNE 24 2008**

**Lesson 13: Religious Diversity**

Reading Assignment

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 13
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Thirteen)
  - a. Griffiths: The Uniqueness of Religious Doctrines
  - b. Rahner: Religious Inclusivism
  - c. Hick: Religious Pluralism

**WEDNESDAY JUNE 25 2008**

**Lesson 14: Religious Ethics**

### Reading Assignment

1. Peterson's *Reason and Religious Belief*: Chapter 14
2. Peterson's *Philosophy of Religion*: (Part Fourteen)
  - a. MacIntyre: Which God Ought We to Obey
  - b. Sartre: Ethics Without Religion
  - c. Aquinas: Ethics and Natural Law

**THURSDAY JUNE 26 2008**

**Completion of Paper**

**FRIDAY JUNE 27 2008**

**Term Paper Due and Reading Report Due**

**You may choose from one of the following Possible Paper Topics, or you may choose to write on any area of philosophy of religion that interests you:**

1. Is it rational to believe in the existence of God? Answer this question in light of the arguments for God's existence presented by at least one of the authors from the assigned readings.
2. What is the relationship between faith and reason? Do they undermine each other? Do they complement each other? With specific reference to the assigned readings, state and justify your opinion.
3. Identify and critique the account of freedom implicit in the Westminster Confession of Faith. State whether or not you think it is an appropriate system of philosophy.
4. Is God eternal or is God everlasting? That is, is it more rational to believe that God exists outside time, or is it more rational to believe that God exists in and within time? State and justify your position. Explain why you reject the alternative position.
5. Formulate a philosophical critique of Michael Martin's "Critique of Religious Experience." How would William James or William Alston respond to Martin's rejection of religious experience?
6. Compare two opposing views of miracles (i.e. either Hume's and Swinburne's, or Mackie's and Swinburne's). State your position, in light of the reading, and justify it.
7. Do we need arguments to prove that God exists? In other words, can we know without arguments that God exists? Argue that we can or cannot in light of the readings assigned for this topic.
8. Is religious experience sufficient to ground faith? Using insights from the readings on this topic, argue that it is or that it is not.
9. State the problem of evil as forcefully as you can, and then respond to it.
10. Is there a relationship between science and religion? Answer in light of Gould's, Dawkins' or Murphy's view.
11. Compare either Price and Badham's or Swinburne's and Badham's account of the Soul's survival after death. Does Badham provide a forceful objection to accounts of life after death? In what way(s) could Price's or Swinburne's position be used to critique Badham's account?

12. In John 14:6 Jesus says “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Also, Acts 4:12 states: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” These scriptural passages define the exclusive nature of Christianity. Does Rahner’s religious inclusivism and Hick’s religious Pluralism undermine the exclusivist claims of Christianity as outlined in these passages? Justify your position.
13. Can we be ethical without God? Answer this question in light of John-Paul Sartre’s view.

## **Course Requirements**

1. **Reading Assignments:** You will be expected to read the material assigned for each of the fourteen lessons. The reading report is due at the end of the Summer Session. A number of these readings are difficult to understand, and may require a “re-read” before you grasp the line of argument.
2. **Class Participation:** You will be required to participate by answering course questions posted on the classroom forum.
  - a. No more than two questions will be provided for each week.
  - b. You will then send your response to the corresponding week’s forum.
  - c. Friday 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of June have been set aside for this activity.
  - d. You must post at least one response by the end of each Friday.
  - e. You must also post at least one response to your classmates’ responses by the Monday following any of the given Fridays.
  - f. You will get credit for positing your answers to the forum, whether you are correct or off the mark.
  - g. Also, if you have a challenging question for your classmates, or even for me, please feel free to ask. I cannot promise to answer all questions to your satisfaction, though.
3. **Term Paper:** One 15 – 20 page paper has been assigned for the semester. Please use any of the standard documentation of your sources. Avoid plagiarism like the plague. Please adhere to the following guidelines as you write your paper.
  - a. State your thesis upfront and clearly. That is, I must not be in doubt as to the position you are trying to defend.
  - b. Support your thesis with equal clarity. Be sure that the reason for your position is clearly stated and cogently argued for. If you reject a specific positions, state clearly why you reject it. For example:
    1. State your position clearly.
    2. State a contrary position and the arguments presented in favor of that position.
    3. Critique the arguments of the contrary position by calling into question the truth of the premises presented for that argument or by showing that the conclusion of that argument does not follow from the premises.
    4. Give reasons why you think your position is better.
    5. Draw attention to possible objections to your position, and forestall them.

- c. Hand in your paper on time!!! An “A” quality paper submitted a day late will, at most, receive a B+ grade. Penalties will be waived only under “academic emergencies” such as serious illness, death of family member (God forbid!), funeral engagements for student pastors, and so on. If you suspect you will submit your paper late, please let me know before Monday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>. This will earn you some grace!
- d. The paper must be typed in regular font (11 or 12) and double-spaced.
- e. Pay attention to spelling and grammar.

### **Grading Procedure**

1. Participation in team forums: 40%
2. Reading: 10%
3. Paper, Due June 27<sup>th</sup>: 50%

### **Means of Communication**

#### **Online (VIRTUAL Classroom) Communication Guidelines**

The Virtual Classroom is built upon the open-source Moodle platform. By logging into <http://virtual.asburyseminary.edu> you will have access to this course and be able to collaborate with participant-colleagues and me throughout the course. The following are functions with which you should familiarize yourself:

1. The Course Information Center, in the center of your screen, contains many features to be used throughout the semester, including:
  - a. Course News and Announcements, where I will post items important for the entire class;
  - b) Syllabus, where a copy of the syllabus is provided;
  - c) To Professor, which is a way for you to post a message directly to me and we can discuss an issue privately;
  - d) Course Questions, which is a public forum where you can publicly post any questions you have regarding the course so others may see your message and respond. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the schedule, the assignments, or anything else that may be of interest to other participants and me you should post it to the Course Questions Forum;
  - e) Prayer Forum, which is a public forum where you can post prayer concerns and praises for all to see. This is a way for us to build community;
  - f) Open Forum, which is a public forum where you can post anything that is not course-related for all to see. Examples include someone getting married, an

upcoming birthday, discussions on topics not course-related, etc. This is a way for us to build community.

2. Modules, which are located below the Course Information Center, will contain forums where e-group discussions will take place, documents or other files to download, and assignment links where you will post your assignments to me. Modules will be clearly labeled so you can follow along during the semester.
3. Resources, a section located on the left side, provides links to items you will want to use often in the semester.

### **ExL Support Contact Information**

For **general questions and administrative assistance regarding the ExL program**, contact Dale Hale: [ExL\\_Office@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu) Phone: (859) 858-2393

For **technical support, library research support, library loans, and ExL media** contact Information Commons: [Info\\_Commons@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:Info_Commons@asburyseminary.edu) Phone: (859) 858-2233; Toll-free: (866) 454-2733

### **Accessing Information Commons Materials**

#### 1. General Questions:

a. The Information Commons is a "one-stop shop" for all student research, circulation and technical needs. The Information Commons hours are posted here: <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information/hours.htm>

#### 2. Materials Requests:

a. To search the library catalog for available materials, click here: <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information/index.htm>

b. ExL Students may request books, photocopies or emailed attachments of journal articles/portions of reference books from Asbury Seminary's Library. Please allow 3-10 business days for all requests to be filled. Contact the Information Commons for costs and instructions on how to make requests.

c. ExL students are encouraged to make use of local library resources. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Kentucky campus should come to campus to obtain their materials.

#### 3. Research Questions:

a. ExL students are encouraged to contact the Information Commons for research assistance including help determining the best sources to use for a paper, finding book reviews, or research questions about using the online databases or any other library materials.

#### 4. Online Databases:

a. To access the online library resources including the library catalog and full-text journal databases, go to <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information/index.htm> and enter your 10-digit student ID# number in the login box. Your student ID# is provided on the biographical information section of the student registration webpage. Add a 2 and enough 0's to the front to make a 10-digit number (20000XXXXX where XXXXX = your student id).

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