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PH 501 Philosophy of Christian Religion

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Introduction
Welcome to PH 501, Asbury Theological Seminary’s introductory course to Philosophy of Christian Religions. Allow me to begin by introducing myself. Originally from Atlanta GA, I have lived in Nashville TN, Kansas City MO, and Dallas TX. I now reside in Charlotte, NC where I am assistant professor of systematic theology at Hood Theological Seminary and an active member of the United Methodist Church. For more on me, check out my resume. Now, let's get to four important questions: What is this course about? What information and skills will I learn through this course? Why is this course important? How will this course work?

I. Course Description: What Is This Course About?
What is philosophy or religion? What are its aims, methods, and contributions? What questions does philosophy of religion seek to answer? A unique and fascinating domain in philosophy, philosophy of religion has primarily to do with the critical examination of basic religious concepts and beliefs. It aims to examine and to evaluate religious concepts and beliefs in
order to determine whether they are coherent, justified, true, rational, and so forth. It does so by the conceptual analysis of propositions and by the logical analysis of arguments. Thus it asks and seeks to answer questions about the existence of God, religious experience, the relationship between faith and reason, the knowledge of God, the problem of evil, divine revelation, religious diversity, the nature of religious language, life after death, miracles, prayer, and many more.

II. Course Objectives: What Information and Skills Will I Learn Through This Course?

By the end of the course students will:

1. Have developed a working philosophical vocabulary that will support further study in theology and related disciplines.

2. Have grasped the vital connection between perennial topics in the philosophy of religion on the one hand, and Christian doctrine, the Christian life, and the practice of Christian ministry on the other.

3. Have been introduced to the major areas of inquiry in the philosophy of Christian religions, e.g., the nature and evidential value of religious experience, the existence of God, miracles, life after death, the coherence of religious language, the problem of evil, religious pluralism, and the like.

4. Be able to identify the way in which philosophical issues often frame and to some degree determine theological debate and theological understanding.

5. Have further cultivated the worship and love of God with one's own mind and, as a result, have further developed intellectual and theological virtues that are distinctively Christian.

III. Course Rationale: Why Is This Course Important?

How can the philosophical study of religion make a difference in our lives today and in our vocations as Christian ministers? Above all, the philosophical study of religion can help us to think more clearly and consistently about things that are often matters of real concern both to us personally and to those whom we will serve. Many people that we will serve as ministers often raise questions that are very similar to the ones that we will take up in this course. They want to know whether God exists. If God does exist,
they want to know whether and how they can really know God. They want to
know why an all-powerful and all-loving God allows persons to suffer. They
want to know whether there is one true religion or many. They want to know
if prayer really makes a difference in the world. By learning to think more
clearly and consistently about such crucial questions, we will be able to respond
in a more helpful manner to persons for whom such questions are not simply a
matter of intellectual gymnastics, but a matter of life and death.

IV. Course Procedures: How Will This Course Work?
This course will revolve largely around our discussions in the discussion
center (see below for a description of the various components of First Class to
be used in this course). These discussions will be based primarily on questions
concerning the required readings for the course. I will post these questions in
modules as we work our way through the required readings. For now, here is a
list of the required readings.

**Required Texts**
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All texts will be available from the bookstore. See the last section of this
syllabus for a more detailed breakdown of specific reading assignments and the
overall course calendar.

**Evaluation Methods**
The following are the assignments for this class and their relative weights in
determining the final grade for the course.

1. **Module Questions** – This course will be divided up into modules (see
below). Each student will be responsible for answering the discussion
questions posted by the professor in the course modules and for responding to
the answers of other students to the same question. All responses should be
posted in the discussion center (see **Using First Class** below). The professor will
post the modules progressively, and he will post questions within each module
progressively. This means that students should check the course module
folders each time they sign on. Don’t worry! The professor will repeat these
instructions in each module. Please note that it is the quality and not the
quantity of your responses that counts. In other words, the professor is not as
concerned with how much you write as he is with what you write. As we get started, you should anticipate that this requirement will fulfill itself. If you are actively participating in the discussion center dialogue, you will not have to worry about this part of your evaluation. Responding to the module questions and to at least two of your fellow students’ responses to each question will constitute 70% of your overall semester grade.

2. Research Paper – Each student will write a major paper on a problem or issue in the philosophy of Christian religions. The student will select the doctrine and the problem of issue to be examined in consultation with the professor. For example, the student might work on the evidential force of religious experience. The research paper is to be no less than ten and no more than twelve pages in length, and it will constitute 30% of the overall semester grade. The project will be due at the end of the semester (a more specific date will be announced later). Papers should be submitted to the PH501 Office (see Using First Class below).

Using First Class

The Course Center will contain a copy of the syllabus as well as all class modules (No interaction takes place here. This is where the professor posts course materials only).

The Discussion Center will be used for all public, class communication. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the modules, the assignments, or anything else that would be of interest to your classmates and the professor, you should post to the Discussion Center.

The DO501 Office is for private correspondence between you and the professor. This will contain items that you do not want to appear publicly before all of your classmates, including assignments, papers, projects, and personal correspondence. This should not be used to ask general course-related questions.

The Archives Center will be used for storing conversations that have already taken place during the course of the semester. This keeps the Discussion Center from becoming too unmanageable.

The Chat Center is intended primarily for real-time interaction among students. You can get together with other members to study, ask
questions, or to explore topics. Remember: None of the conversations carried on in this location are ever saved.

The Resource Center provides access to a number of specific tools available to all ExL students. These include access to the B.L. Fisher Library, chapel services in Estes Chapel, ExL Updates, Guidelines for Success, Helpful Hints, Interesting Links, a Powerpoint Viewer, and a Real Audio Player.

**For Assistance with First Class and with Library Resources**

For general questions regarding the ExL program, email ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu

For technical support, email ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu

**Obtaining Library Materials and Assistance**

General Questions: information_commons@asburyseminary.edu Toll-free 1-866-454-2733

This is the best place to start when you have questions about library resources. Help is available Monday-Thursday from 8AM-7PM and Friday and Saturday from 8AM-5:45PM. If the people at the desk cannot answer your questions, they will direct you to the person or department who can.

Materials Requests: library_loan@asburyseminary.edu Or call toll-free 1-866-454-2733

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

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

Research Questions: Hannah_Kirsch@asburyseminary.edu Or call the toll-free number and ask to be transferred to Hannah (x2189).

ExL students are encouraged to contact Hannah Kirsch for research assistance including help choosing a paper topic, 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.

**Online Databases:**

To access the online library resources including the library catalog and full-text journal databases, go to [www.asburyseminary.edu/library](http://www.asburyseminary.edu/library) 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 ten digit number (20000XXXXX where XXXXX = your student id). If you have questions, contact the information commons desk.