

BRIERCREST

THEO 650 Theology of God and Creation Fall 2019

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Course Dates: Sept 30 – Oct 4, 2019

3 Credit Hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This foundational course introduces the task and importance of systematic theology for Christian teaching (doctrine) and ministry. Special focus is given to outlining, biblically and historically, the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of God as Creator and Lord of Creation, and the doctrine of humanity.

COURSE INTEGRATION

A great number of current crises in church, family and society--issues such as marriage, human sexuality, environment/ecology, the definition of family, and the matter of human flourishing—are integrally bound up with particular views (many of which are theologically suspect) concerning the origin, nature and place of humans in the world. Many Christians however, do not know how to identify those assumptions about divine and creaturely being that are truly secular versus those that are grounded in a firm grasp of the Christian teaching of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as the transcendent Creator and Lord of all human life and activity. This course will seek to lay a theological foundation for all those who will be called upon to testify to the truth of the Gospel on these issues in the church and the world today.

COURSE TEXTS

Torrance, Thomas F. *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996. Reprint: Continuum, 2002. (256 pages)
Dolezal, James E. *All that is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017. (137 pages)
McFarland, Ian A. *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014. (189 pages)

(Note: It will be most helpful to read the books in the order listed above.)

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

Students will need to obtain a copy of one of the following books, a chapter of which will be the focus of your class presentation. (See mid-course assignment.)

Gundry, Stanley N. and Stump, eds. *Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017.

Gundry, Stanley N. and Halton, eds. *Genesis: History, Fiction or Neither?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.

Gundry, Stanley N. and Sexton, eds. *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

Students are expected to refer to Briercrest Seminary's Format and Style Guides and Guide for Writing Research Papers, available as PDF documents here: <https://www.mybriercrest.ca/seminary/documents/>.

These texts are available in store and online at the Briercrest Bookstore: <http://briercrest.ca/bookstore>.

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on Canvas (<https://briercrest.instructure.com>; cf. <http://briercrest.ca/online/canvas>) and their myBriercrest.ca email account.

COURSE OUTCOMES

Students who complete this course of study should be able to:

1. Articulate a basic understanding of the essential terms and themes of the Christian doctrines of God and Creation, including the knowledge of God, the eternal being and perfections of God, the Trinity, *homoousios*, *perichoresis*, creation out of nothing, providence, humanity and the fall.
2. Read and critically assess various academic theological proposals (ancient, medieval and Modern) pertaining to the doctrines of God and Creation, on the basis of sound biblical and theological understanding.
3. Discuss the significance of the doctrines of God and Creation for other theological loci such as salvation, ethics, and Christian life and hope.
4. Reflect meaningfully on this subject matter for personal spiritual formation, the mission of the church and Christian witness in the world today.
5. Apply enhanced research, critical thinking and writing skills in the particular disciplines unique to faithful Christian academic theology.

COURSE OUTLINE AND CONTENT

Note: This course will take the form of a reading intensive interchange, consisting of a series of "agenda setting" lectures by the instructor and student-led theological discussions, based upon course readings and reflections. Thus, the success of the course will depend greatly on students coming to class having read carefully and thoroughly the assigned textbooks before the course begins. The topics listed below are suggestive starting points. Actual discussion will vary on the basis of students' "discussion papers" (see pre-course assignments). The outline below is subject to change depending on the number of students enrolled. (Sections may be further subdivided to accommodate the number of students presenting.)

Date	Topic	Student Presentation
Sept. 30 am	Introduction/Syllabus Introduction to the Doctrine of God The Being and Perfections of God Biblical, Historical and Theological Context	

Sept. 30 pm	Torrance (pp. 1-111): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Self-Revelation of God • The Unity of Revelation and Reconciliation • The Nature of Christian Knowledge of God 	
Oct. 1 am	Torrance (pp. 112-256): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Being of God's Personal Unity – <i>Ousia</i> • The Unity of God's Personal Being – <i>Perichoresis</i> • Father, Son and Holy Spirit – The Tri-Unity of God • Immutable Creator 	
Oct. 1 pm	Dolezal (pp. 1-137): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Simplicity of God 	
Oct. 2 am	Gundry and Sexton: <i>The Doctrine of the Trinity</i>	Discussion Papers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Holmes, pp. 25-68 2. Molnar, pp. 69-112 3. McCall, pp. 113-158 4. Fiddes, pp. 159-206
Oct. 2 pm	Gundry and Halton: <i>Genesis: History, Fiction or Neither?</i>	Discussion Papers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Hoffmeier, pp. 21-71 6. Wenham, pp. 72-108 7. Sparks, 109-153
Oct. 3 am	Gundry and Stump: <i>Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design.</i>	Discussion Papers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Ham, 17-70 9. Ross, 71-123 10. Haarsma, 124-176 11. Meyer, 177-230
Oct. 3 pm	McFarland, Chapters 1 – 4: <i>God Creates From Nothing</i>	
Oct. 4 am	McFarland, Chapters 5 – 8: <i>Evil, Providence And New Creation</i>	

ASSIGNMENTS

Pre-Course Assignments:

1. Readings (15%): The following readings should be completed before the beginning of class: Dolezal, MacFarland, Torrance (approx. 600 pages). These materials will form the essential content for lectures and class discussions. Students will be expected to participate actively by contributing thoughtfully to the discussions. Students will be required to indicate that all assigned readings have been completed by the beginning of class **Monday, Sept. 30.** (Learning outcomes 1, 2 and 3)

Due: Sept. 30, 2019, submitted to Canvas

2. Doctrinal Overview (20%): Using a major evangelical systematic theology textbook (Michael Bird, Millard Erickson, Wayne Grudem, Michael Horton, Thomas Oden) as a guide, students will prepare a balanced 2000 word biblical and theological overview of the doctrines of God, Creation and Human Being. Your doctrinal overview will account for the essential biblical and theological features of each doctrine and the ecumenical teachings of the Christian church on these themes. This is to be something of an extended contemporary statement of faith on the doctrine as traditionally understood by the church. This overview is to be as comprehensive and precise as you can be. Be sure to incorporate Scriptural references (not included in the word count) to support your claims. This assignment is to be completed by the beginning of class **Monday, Sept. 30.** (Learning outcomes 1, 2 and 3)

Due: Sept. 30, 2019, submitted to Canvas

Mid-Course Assignment:

3. Class Presentation and Discussion Paper (15%): Each student will prepare a class presentation on a reading (chapter or essay) chosen from the list below in agreement with the instructor. Each student will be responsible to summarize, critique and lead a class discussion on one particular selected reading assigned for that session. Your presentation must include: i) a ten (10) minute oral presentation introducing the major ideas and arguments propounded in the readings; ii) a two page (bullet point, single spaced, double-sided, printed and distributed to each class member) critical summary of the key themes arising from the material; and iii) a facilitated thirty (30) minute discussion by means of questions and observations designed to guide the class progressively through the material (with the assistance of the instructor and the participation of class mates). Think of your discussion presentation along the lines of a "script" for a provocative or interesting interchange on the most important issues arising from the readings. Excellent discussion papers will be clear, informative, concise, creative, accurate (representing the material well), balanced (evenly covering all the important themes in the time allotted) and worthy of debate! (Learning outcomes 1-5)

Due: Discussion Papers will be due at the beginning of the class for which they are assigned. There will be time periods designated (as per the outline above) to present and discuss your reading critiques. The sections for which you can sign up are as follows:

Gundry and Sexton, eds.:

The Doctrine of the Trinity

1. Holmes (Classical Trinity – Evangelical Perspective), pp. 25-68
2. Molnar (Classical Trinity – Catholic Perspective), pp. 69-112
3. McCall (Relational Trinity – Creedal Perspective), pp. 113-158
4. Fiddes (Relational Trinity – Radical Perspective), pp. 159-206

Gundry and Halton, eds.:

Genesis: History, Fiction or Neither?

5. Hoffmeier (Genesis 1-11 as History and Theology), pp. 21-71
6. Wenham (Genesis 1-11 as Protohistory), pp. 72-108
7. Sparks (Genesis 1-11 as Ancient Historiography), 109-153

Gundry and Stump, eds.:

Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design

8. Ham (Young Earth Creationism), 17-70
9. Ross (Old Earth Creationism), 71-123
10. Haarsma (Evolutionary Creation), 124-176
11. Meyer (Intelligent Design), 177-230

VERY IMPORTANT: Beginning on Sept. 1, 2019 and no later than Sept. 16, 2019, please email the instructor (via Canvas) indicating your top two choices for which book portion you wish to present to the class. The instructor will attempt to give each student's first choice, but no guarantee can be given. Sign-ups will be on a "first come, first served" basis. The instructor reserves the right to reassign your choices.

Prepare enough copies for each person in the class. This must be distributed as a hard copy (i.e., no emailed copies will be accepted for this assignment).

Evaluation: Because these are meant to be papers designed to get the class talking about theological issues raised in the course texts, the marking will emphasize the effectiveness of the *presentation* and not just its written quality. Thus 75% of the grade per paper will be on the presentation and guided class discussion, while 25% of the grade will be on the written paper itself. Consequently, it is just as important to think about *how* you are going to foster discussion as it is *what* you are going to present.

Post-Course Assignment:

4. Major Theological Research Essay (50%)

Due: Nov. 29, 2019, submitted to Canvas

- a) Select a major Christian theologian (see list below for suggestions); identify, analyze and evaluate his/her account of the doctrine of God and its contribution to our understanding in light of the important themes discussed in this course.

Athanasius, Augustine, Aquinas, John Calvin, Hermann Bavinck, Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, T.F. Torrance.

Or,

- b) Discuss one of the important themes of the major doctrines (God, Creation, Humanity) addressed in this course (see list below for suggestions), offering a detailed and thoughtful account of its biblical, historical and theological aspects. Your paper must interact with some of the most influential authors on the topic.

The Proofs for the Existence of God
The Doctrine of the Trinity: One Being, Three Persons
The Arian Controversy
The Trinity and Homoousios
The Trinity and Perichoresis
The Filioque Controversy

The Immanent and Economic Trinity
The Perfections (Attributes) of God
God and His Revelation
The Holy Spirit
The 20th Century Rediscovery of the Trinity
Social Trinitarianism

The "Openness" of God
Creatio Ex Nihilo
The Triune Creator
The Providence of God
Creation and New Creation
Genesis 1 and the Myths

Various Interpretations of Genesis 1
Creation and Evolution
The Imago Dei (Image of God)
Embodiment and Gender
The Relation of Eternity and Time
Sin and the Fall

Papers should be a maximum of 15 pages (4500 words) and must adhere to Briercrest Seminary Format guidelines (available online at the Briercrest Seminary website). Excellent papers are those that demonstrate evidence of significant research (i.e., not just made up in your head!), are biblically sound, are theologically coherent, and are able to unify theology and ministry (i.e., how theological reflection and pastoral practice are in alignment with each other). It is advisable though not necessary to gain advance approval of the topic. You are encouraged to "bounce your ideas" off the instructor.

Your Research Essay should consist of the following:

- A clear thesis statement which you intend to argue in your paper and a brief description of how you intend to demonstrate your thesis. This should be included in the first paragraph of your paper.
- A progressive argument following a logical sequence, each section building on the previous section with compelling insights and ample evidence, proceeding cumulatively to a persuasive conclusion.
- At least twelve (12) respected references on the question (not including the Bible). These will mostly be from published books and peer reviewed journals (whether digital or print), not Internet sources of lesser quality.
- Evidence of thorough interaction with the material, demonstrated in the breadth and judicious use of the material referenced and in the employment of the technical theological language pertaining to your chosen topic.
- Critical and creative engagement with the topic, demonstrating independent yet appreciative thinking on the topic.

SEMINARY CALENDAR

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest Seminary, all of which are published in the current Seminary Calendar:

<https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/academics/calendar/>.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend 100% of each modular for which they register. If this is impossible due to extenuating circumstances, arrangements must be made with the course professor before the first day of class. If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending class, a maximum of one full day of class can be foregone. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

Course Schedules

Classes begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning and run a minimum of 30 hours through the course of the week. The schedule is determined by the course professor. Students should check the

syllabus for specifics. When the syllabus does not state class times, students are responsible to check with the professor prior to making travel plans.

Assignment Submission

All assignments must be submitted no later than eight weeks after the last day of class as stated in the syllabus. The correct due dates will be clearly noted in the syllabus and each faculty member will state in their syllabus how assignments should be submitted. Assignments submitted within a week after the due date will be accepted with a 10 per cent penalty. For additional information refer to the late assignment policy or the extension policy in the [academic calendar](#).

Return of Graded Assignments

Professors are expected to return graded assignments within six weeks of the due date. If they fail to do so, students may submit an inquiry to the [Seminary](#). If an extension is granted, the professor is no longer obligated to meet this deadline.

Academic Honesty

Students are accountable to perform each task according to principles of academic honesty. Please refer to pages 24-25 in the [academic calendar](#) for more information.

Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or health condition who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should discuss them with the course instructor after contacting the Director of Student Success in person (L234 in the Library), by telephone (1-306-756-3230) or by email (studentsuccesscentre@briercrest.ca). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.).

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