

BRIERCREST

THEO 653 Theology of Christ and Reconciliation Fall 2022

Professor: Joel Houston, PhD, FRHistS

Email: jhouston@briercrest.ca

Phone: 306-756-3245

Course Dates: December 12-16, 2022
On campus modular course

3 Credit Hours



COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the person and work of Jesus Christ as the centre of Christian life, faith, and experience. In conversation with historic and current theological literature, the course will outline how, in the biblical pattern of Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ reconciles fallen sinners with the Father in the Spirit. Special attention may be given to one or more doctrines such as election, adoption, regeneration, atonement, justification, sanctification, or glorification.

COURSE INTEGRATION

"Who do people say the Son of Man is"? Jesus's beguilingly simple question to Peter (Matt 16:13) is as timely today as it was when the query was first posed. Who, indeed, is the Son of Man, and what was the nature of his ministry? Peter and the Scriptural witness affirm: Jesus is "the Christ, the son of the living God" who "came to seek and save the lost." These pithy statements form the core of what would become two millennia of reflection on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

This course, therefore, seeks to construct a robust Christology from the perspective of the Protestant Evangelical tradition. Special attention will be given to understanding the Scriptural witness of the person and work of Christ, and especially, a biblically justifiable and theologically charitable account of the atonement.

This course also maintains a special interest in the way in which Christology remains a lively and ubiquitous aspect of nearly all aspects of the human experience. The person of Christ "haunts" the arts, humanities, and sciences—indeed, the natural world itself (as G.M. Hopkins stated, "Christ plays in 10,000 places"). Applying the tools of exegetical and theological reflection, this course will seek to uncover the way Christology, almost uniquely, extends beyond the boundaries of traditional systematic theology.

COURSE TEXTS

Ortlund, Dane C. *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*. Illinois: Crossway, 2020.

O'Connor, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971. [Selected short stories only].

Rutledge, Fleming. *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017.

St. Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation*. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011.

Selected Articles Available on Canvas

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 will...

- 1) Be able to articulate the tenets of an exegetically sound and theologically defensible Christology from the perspective of orthodox Christianity.
- 2) Understand the importance of the Chalcedonian definition of the person of Christ while considering historic and contemporary challenges.
- 3) Appreciate the way in which Christology has exerted, and continues to exert, a profound influence across diverse disciplines, cultures, and theologies.
- 4) Develop strategies to apply key insights concerning the person and work of Christ to contemporary circumstances including preaching, teaching, evangelism, and scholarship.
- 5) Gain insight into the historical development of Christology through the ages and how seminal thinkers in the Christian tradition have contributed to this growth and development.

COURSE OUTLINE AND CONTENT

A comprehensive course schedule with lecture subjects and provisional content will be posted on Canvas by 1 December 2022.

ASSIGNMENTS

Pre-Course Assignments:

The "Cultural Christ" – 15%

*"...And in the choir
I saw our sad messiah
He was bored and tired of my lament
He said, 'I died for you one time, but never again.'"*

- Brand New, "Limousine", *God and the Devil are Raging Inside Me*

Echoes of the person and work of Christ have emanated from the cross to the present day. From the arts and sciences to the humanities; from politics to the exploration of the natural world, the shadow cast by Christ is long indeed. Persons from all walks of life and various vocations have sought to understand Jesus and his significance for the world.

Students will choose a "cultural artefact" and write a **5-page** paper exploring the artefact's Christological themes, overtones, or reflections. Cultural artefacts include dramas, songs, poetry, visual arts, political movements, architecture, etc. Students are encouraged to think creatively and expansively for this topic. Excellent papers will seek to show how Christological images, themes, or ideas are present in the artefact, and what purpose they *might* serve. Reference to relevant scriptural passages and theological doctrines is essential. Judgment need not be pronounced; a sustained reflection is all that is required. Images and themes of Christ may be overt, or covert, clearly presented, or ambiguous. The purpose of this assignment is to observe how pervasive the person of Christ and understandings of his work are throughout the last two millennia. Students are encouraged to consult with the professor of record as to their chosen artefact, and how they might address the Christological themes present.

The Cultural Christ Paper Due: December 12th, 2022

Synthesized Reading Precis, Critique and Reflection – 15%

Students will read Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, and the following short stories from O'Connor's *Complete Stories*:

- "Parker's Back"
- "A Good Man is Hard to Find"
- "Revelation"
- "The River"
- "The Life you Save May Be Your Own"
- "Greenleaf"¹

Following from these readings, students will write a **6-page** synthesized reading response. The response should include the following elements: a clear understanding of the contents of the work (which may include summative portions, but should not simply be a 6 page summary), a word of critique as to the strengths and weaknesses of the various works, and finally a personal reflection as to which works were most significant for the student and why (note that, of course, it may simply be portions of certain works, as opposed to the entirety). Even distribution for each of the three works should be given, so ample planning should accompany the writing of this paper. Excellent papers will avoid over-long summaries, use page-specific citations, employ thoughtful and nuanced criticism, and evidence careful reflection and integration of the three works.

Reading Precis, Critique, and Completion: December 12th, 2022

¹As an instructor, I take seriously my role in creating a hospitable classroom environment and protecting the "conscience rights" of students. O'Connor's short stories can be a difficult read. Flannery O'Connor (1925-64) wrote within the context of the American South. O'Connor consistently offered a scathing critique of the overt racism that permeated her society and did so (in part) by representing the South as it was: complete with violence, racial slurs, and through the depiction of race relations that some readers may find unjustified, uncomfortable, or offensive. The inclusion of this source *is not an endorsement of its content or language*. If you would like a substitute reading for this assignment, please do not hesitate to ask.

Mid-Course Assignments:***In-Class Presentation: Aspects of the Atonement – 25%***

Students will, in groups corresponding to the total class number, present a perspective on the atonement and lead the class in a discussion. Students are expected to develop **seminar-level** presentations which include, but are not limited to, appropriate visuals (e.g., power-point), suitable handouts and appropriate facilitation of class interaction (suggestions for discussion, in-class activities, etc.).

Students will be evaluated for their ability to comprehensively account for the contents of their respective view of the atonement. Additionally, creativity and quality of presentation will account for the grade constitution. Groups will be selected by the instructor and announced via *Canvas*. **After the groups have been announced they are free to select one of the views of the atonement from the list below. Topics will be assigned on a “first come first served” basis.** A suitable presentation will run for 60 minutes of class time (groups should plan to give students a 5-minute stretch break in the middle of the presentation). Presentations should seek to cover the following:

- The essential understanding, or argument, of their respective view of the atonement.
- The scriptural and theological foundation for their view.
- Historic individuals (or denominations within the Christian tradition) that have formulated or advocated for the view.
- Theological or scriptural challenges to the view (or difficulties with the view).
- A personal assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the view.

Students may select one theory of the atonement from the list below:

- *Christus Victor*
- Penal Substitutionary Atonement
- Ransom
- Satisfaction
- Scapegoat
- Governmental
- Moral Influence

Other theories may be considered for presentation *but must be approved by the instructor in advance*. Students will submit their presentation materials to the instructor of record for final evaluation. These materials are **due on the day of presentation**.

In-Class Presentations Due: Throughout the Week of December 12th-16th

Post-Course Assignments:***Who Cares About Heresy? – 15%***

The first few centuries of the church were marked with a great many controversies surrounding both the Trinity, and the person and work of Jesus Christ. It can be difficult to appreciate why exactly it took so long to understand the nature of Christ and his ministry, and why there was such strident disagreement over seemingly insignificant points of doctrine.

Students will write a **4-page** paper that explains why understanding Christological heresies are important for today. Why should the contemporary believer care that Jesus “came in the flesh”?

Does Christ have one will, or two (or more?!) and why does that matter? How does it affect faith and practice?

The focus of this work is *contemporary application*, not historical recollection. This is to say that the paper is decidedly not an exercise in detailing historical theology—rather, it is the measured, thoughtful *application of it*. Students are encouraged to select one, or perhaps two, significant Christological heresies and argue for the orthodox understanding today. Excellent papers will show a thorough understanding of the nature of the Christological heresy under investigation, the conditions that gave rise to the particular view, the danger that it poses to an orthodox understanding of Christ, and why the contemporary believer is better served by holding the orthodox confession.

“Who Cares About Heresy?” Paper Due: January 13th, 2023

Atonement Theology / Theological Christology Paper – 30%

Following the course, students will write an **8-page** paper on one of the following topics.

EITHER:

1. A position paper on the nature of the atonement.

OR

2. A paper that presents the Christology of a prominent theologian or theological movement (Liberation, Black, Queer, Marxist, etc.).

In the case of option 1 (the nature of the atonement) students are expected to not only advance the argument for the superior theory of the atonement, but also, must demonstrate *why* the theory advanced is superior (according to what criteria), and account for the way in which other theories interact with each other.

In the case of option 2 (Christology of a prominent theologian or movement), students must restrict the scope of their investigation to a particular aspect of Christology so as to ensure sufficient coverage of the topic in the paper. **Students must approve their topic with the instructor of record by January 10th, 2023.**

Atonement Theology / Theological Christology Paper Due: February 10th, 2023

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

In order to benefit fully from a seminary education, to be good stewards of time and finances, and to be considerate of their classmates and faculty members, students must be in class at every opportunity.

Modular Courses

Students are expected to attend 100 per cent 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 (1) 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.

Online Courses

If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending scheduled meeting times, then up to 20% of meeting time can be foregone. Students missing scheduled meeting times should make every effort to inform the course professor prior to any time missed. 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.

Semester-Based Courses

All students missing more than two full weeks of a particular course from registration to the last day of classes will receive an automatic fail (0%). A student may appeal a course failure due to excessive absences. Successful appeals will be granted only in rare cases where all absences are clearly beyond the student's control. Appeals must be made through the Academic Appeal Process.

Course Schedules

Modular 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 (egordon@briercrest.ca). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A full bibliography will be posted to *Canvas*. Note: students are encouraged to contribute to the posted bibliography.