

BRIERCREST

THEO 601 Christian Theology Overview Winter 2024

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Course Dates: Jan 8 – Mar 25, 2024
Course Delivery Method: Online

3 Credit Hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A basic overview of the central doctrines of the Christian faith, designed for those who have no previous, formal training in Christian theology, or for those who need a refresher. Students develop a basic understanding of the method and content of systematic theology as presented in the Apostles' Creed and the classical evangelical tradition. For MATS and MABLE students, this course may be used in the core by permission of the program coordinator.

COURSE INTEGRATION

This course offers a survey of the essential theological teachings of the Christian faith, with a particular focus on its Protestant and Evangelical expressions. Fundamental Christian doctrines will be explored with reference to their biblical foundations, historical development and systematic cohesiveness. Consideration will be given to the formulations of the ecumenical Christian creeds and councils and their relation to the doctrinal articulations of contemporary denominational groupings. Special attention will be given to the manner in which core doctrines provide an indispensable theological framework for life and mission in the contemporary world.

COURSE FORMAT

This online course will commonly involve multiple weekly learning components: 1) textbook readings; 2) an online discussion forum; 3) live Zoom lectures and 4) in-class discussion. On occasion, pre-recorded lectures may be used.

COURSE TEXTS

Bird, Michael F. *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*. Second edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-310-09397-8

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

Anticipated outcomes for students of this course of study include:

1. The ability to articulate the core teachings of Christian Theology, as well as its role and significance for the individual believer, the church and society as a whole.
2. A knowledgeable appreciation of the biblical, historical and theological underpinnings of the major doctrines of the Christian church.
3. The ability to critically assess various theological positions and proposals on the basis of sound biblical and theological reasoning.
4. An appreciation of the importance, depth, and power of Christian Theology for ecclesial life and mission in the world.
5. A deepened commitment to the gospel and its message of hope for the world.
6. A substantial basis for the composition of the doctrinal portion of the student's graduation portfolio.

COURSE OUTLINE AND CONTENT

DATE	THEME & CORE READINGS
Jan 8, 6-9 pm	ORIENTATION & SYLLABUS PROLEGOMENA; SOURCES FOR THEOLOGY Read: Bird, pp. 1-95 (§§ 1.1-1.8)
Jan 15, 6-9 pm	THE EXISTENCE AND PERFECTIONS OF GOD; THE REVELATION OF GOD Read: Bird, pp. 180-202; 220-268 (§§ 2.3; 2.5)
Jan 22, 6-9 pm	THE TRIUNE GOD Read: Bird, pp. 99-179 (§§ 2.1-2.2) Due: Doctrinal Assessment, 11:59pm
Jan 29, 6-9 pm	GOD THE FATHER CREATION & PROVIDENCE Read: Bird, pp. 203-219; 269-293 (§§ 2.4; 2.6)
Feb 5, 6-9 pm	HUMANITY, SIN AND EVIL Read: Bird, pp. 729-800 (§§ 7.1-7.6)
Feb 12, 6-9 pm	GOD THE SON CHRISTOLOGICAL METHOD; THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CHRIST Read: Bird, pp. 395-493 (§§ 4.1-4.4)
Feb 19	FAMILY DAY – NO CLASS Due: Mid-Term Take Home Exam, 11:59pm
Feb 26, 6-9 pm	GOD THE SON THE RESURRECTION, ASCENSION AND IDENTITY OF CHRIST Reading: Bird, pp. 494-548 (§§ 4.5-4.7)
Mar 4, 6-9 pm	SALVATION Read: Bird, pp. 549-663 (§§ 5.1-5.5)
Mar 11, 6-9 pm	GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT Read: Bird, pp. 665-728 (§§ 6.1-6.3)
Mar 18, 6-9 pm	THE CHURCH Read: Bird, pp. 801-911 (§§ 8.1-8.6)
Mar 25, 6-9 pm	LAST THINGS Reading: Bird, pp. 295-393 (§§ 3.1-3.7) Due: Doctrinal Position Paper, 11:59pm
Apr 1	Due: Final Take Home Exam, 11:59pm

ASSIGNMENTS

The desired learning outcomes of this course will be achieved through attending the lectures, reading the required materials, and successful completion of the class assignments. The greater the investment students make in this regard, the greater the learning.

Student Evaluation will be based on the following:

1. Textbook Readings & Online Discussions **(15%)** Due: weekly (graded at end of course)
2. Doctrinal Statement Assessment **(5%)** Due: 11:59pm, Jan 22, 2024
3. Discussion Paper & Presentation **(15%)** Due: as assigned in course schedule
4. Mid-Term Take Home Exam **(20%)** Due: 11:59pm, Feb 19, 2024
5. Doctrinal Position Paper **(25%)** Due: 11:59pm, Mar 25, 2024
6. Final Take Home Exam **(20%)** Due: 11:59pm, April 1, 2024

1. **TEXTBOOK READINGS AND ONLINE DISCUSSION (15%)** Due: 24 hours prior to class
Students are expected to participate in the Canvas discussion forum at least 24 hours prior to the beginning of the class session. Having completed the assigned readings for the week, each student is to identify a **"most intriguing/insightful passage"** which you would like to discuss further. Students must upload **one original engaging post (250 words)**, indicating: 1) the intriguing topic/issue (including a reference to page and paragraph in the textbook), and 2) a leading question designed to engage the class in further discussion. Students must then **respond (100 words)** to at least **two other posts** from your classmates. Since time will not permit every question to be taken up in live in-class discussion, the professor will select a few that will be discussed. Other in-class discussion will involve Zoom break out groups and/or chat.

Evaluation: Because these are meant to be questions designed to get the class discussing the most important theological issues raised in the course texts, the marking will take into account the quality of both the **original posts** and the **response posts** of each student in the discussions. The grade for each student will be based upon your contributions as a whole (not a week by week grade) upon the completion of our class meetings. General comments will be offered occasionally by the Professor to the class as a whole to gauge how you are doing.

(Learning Outcomes 3, 4 and 5)

2. **DOCTRINAL STATEMENT ASSESSMENT (5%)** Due: 11:59pm, Jan 22, 2024, submitted to Canvas
Each student will secure a copy of the "Statement of Faith" of their own church or denomination or tradition (or of that church/denomination/tradition with which the student aspires to serve/associate). The Statement of Faith should be a minimum of 500 words, and should contain statements on most if not all of the doctrinal themes listed below.

Students will compose a 1000 word (approx. 4 pages) critical commentary on the Statement of Faith. Carefully scrutinize the Statement of Faith, reflecting at each point upon its biblical foundation and theological consistency. Note the particulars of structure, substance and emphasis. What is included and what is not? What is the purpose and significance of these details? As you analyze, identify where you are in full agreement with the Statement of Faith, where you disagree, and where you may have questions. Articulate these and other

observations in an orderly fashion as you work systematically through the following major doctrinal themes:

- The Holy Scriptures
- God and the Trinity
- Creation
- Human Beings and Sin
- The Person of Christ
- The Saving Work of Christ
- Salvation (Election, Justification, Faith and Sanctification)
- The Holy Spirit
- The Church (its nature and work)
- Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- Last Things
- The Final State of Human Persons

Note: The purpose of this exercise is not to solve all of the doctrinal questions you have, but to raise the most important ones and to initiate a quest for greater understanding. Attach the original Statement of Faith with your Doctrinal Assessment. (Learning Outcomes 1 and 6)

3. **DISCUSSION PAPER AND PRESENTATION (15%)** Due as assigned in the course schedule. Each session at least one student will be responsible to summarize, **critique and lead a class discussion on an additional reading** assigned for that session. Your presentation must include: **i) a ten minute oral presentation** introducing the major ideas and arguments propounded in the reading; **ii) a two page critical summary** of the key themes arising from the material (can be point form); and **iii) a ten minute facilitated 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 classmates). 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), and worthy of debate! (Learning Outcomes 1-3)

VERY IMPORTANT: Topics/Readings for Discussion papers will be posted on the Canvas course page no later than Jan 8, 2024. Beginning on Jan 8, 2024 and no later than Jan 15, 2024 please email the instructor at ddawson@briercrest.ca indicating your top **two** choices for which reading you wish to present to the class. The instructor will attempt to give each student's first choice, but no guarantee can be made that you will receive your first choice, or your preferred texts. Sign-ups will be on a "first come, first served" basis. The instructor reserves the right to reassign your choices. Presentations will begin on Jan 22.

Upload your two-page summary to the Discussion Presentation Forum by 5:30pm on the evening you are presenting so that each student may have the opportunity to review it ahead of time.

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.

(Learning Outcomes 3, 4 and 5)

4. **MID-TERM EXAM (20%)** Due: 11:59pm, Feb 19, 2024, submitted to Canvas

The mid-term exam will be a take home exam with strict word limits on the exam question page. The exam will cover the readings, lectures and in-class discussions covered to that point. You may use your textbooks and notes, but your answers must be your own work in your own words. You may not consult with anyone else unless you have explicit permission from the Professor. The exam will include both short answer and short essay questions to be answered in proper paragraph and short essay style. Students are advised to keep a copy of all their work.

5. **DOCTRINAL POSITION PAPER (25%)** Due: 11:59pm, Mar 25, 2024, submitted to Canvas

On the basis of the Doctrinal Assessments and the learning achieved throughout the course, each student will prepare his or her own personal Doctrinal Position statement, complete with clear, concise and balanced affirmations and parenthetical supporting biblical references. Papers will be organized according to the same major doctrinal themes:

- The Holy Scriptures
- God and the Trinity
- Creation
- Human Beings and Sin
- The Person of Christ
- The Saving Work of Christ
- Salvation (Election, Justification, Faith and Sanctification)
- The Holy Spirit
- The Church (nature and work)
- Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- Last Things
- The Final State of Human Persons

The purpose of this assignment is for each student to present his or her own theological commitments as developed and refined throughout the course. This is not a research project per se, though consultation of two or three key systematic sources is strongly recommended. The Doctrinal Position Paper will not be a repeat of the Doctrinal Assessment, but rather a personal statement of beliefs using the precision of developed theological language to express, as fully and accurately as possible, the student's own convictions and conclusions.

Excellent Doctrinal Position Papers will be clear, concise, cogent and theologically consistent. They will include accurate explanations of key theological terms (such as "Trinity," "persons," "inspiration," "atonement," "justification," etc.) and their significance. They will include Scriptural support for each major doctrine. They will be judicious in content and coverage. Students are welcome to use and/or adapt an existing statement of faith provided that they properly cite the original statement of faith, and give ample evidence of a thorough

reworking and personal assimilation of the assertions made. The Doctrinal Position Paper must be the student's own work, and not a simple reproduction of another's work, all the while using precise theological language and formulae.

Doctrinal Position Papers should be roughly 2500 words (approx. 10 pages).

Note: It would be wise for each student to keep this assignment in mind--taking notes, collecting insights and reflecting on these themes--as the mid-course lectures and discussions proceed through this material.

(Learning Outcomes 1, 4, 5 and 6)

6. **FINAL EXAM (20%)** Due: 11:59pm, Apr 1, 2024, submitted to Canvas

The final exam will be a take home exam with strict word limits on the exam question page. The exam will cover the readings, lectures and in-class discussions covered throughout the course but focusing on the material in the second half. You may use your textbooks and notes, but your answers must be your own work in your own words. You may not consult with anyone else unless you have explicit permission from the Professor. The exam will include both short answer and short essay questions to be answered in proper paragraph and short essay style.

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

This is an online course. Classes run from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on Mondays. 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 the due date stated in the syllabus. 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

As members of the Briercrest learning community, students have a responsibility to conduct themselves with integrity and honour. Students who cheat on exams, plagiarize, inappropriately collaborate, or use generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) without instructor authorization in the preparation and/or submission of their assignments violate the trust placed in them by their instructors, fellow students, and the seminary. Any such actions constitute a breach of academic honesty and will result in serious consequences, such as failure of an assignment, failure of a course, or expulsion from the seminary.

Plagiarism, whether intentional or involuntary, is the submission of the work of others, published or unpublished, in whole or in part without acknowledgment or proper documentation. All information, ideas and/or direct quotations taken from other primary or secondary sources must be documented appropriately. Students are responsible to ensure they are using their sources with transparency and honesty. For more details, consult the [Seminary Calendar](#). In addition to being familiar with these pages, instructors assume that you have completed the Briercrest Academic Integrity course on [Canvas](#) and understand the information contained in it.

Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or health condition (mental or physical) who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should contact the ARC Coordinator in person (L234 in the Library), by phone (1-306-801-6159), or by email (arc@briercrest.ca). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.). It is recommended that students meet with their professors to discuss the requirements of their accommodations (i.e., how the student will receive lecture notes, or how the professor wants to receive extension requests).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Apostles' Creed: <https://www.anglican.ca/about/beliefs/apostles-creed/>

Nicene Creed: <https://www.anglican.ca/about/beliefs/nicene-creed/>

Athanasian Creed: <https://www.anglican.ca/about/beliefs/athanasian-creed/>

Augsburg Confession (Lutheran): <https://www.stpls.com/uploads/4/4/8/0/44802893/augsburg-confession.pdf>

Anglican (39 Articles): <https://www.anglican.ca/about/beliefs/39-articles/>

Westminster Confession: https://reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/

Reformed Baptist: <https://www.reformedontheweb.com/confessions/1677-89-london-baptist-confession-of-faith.pdf>

Arminian: <http://evangelicalarminians.org/statement-of-faith/>

Wesleyan: <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/confession-of-faith>

Free Methodist (Canada): <https://www.fmcic.ca/our-ethos/articles-of-religion/>

PAOC: https://paoc.org/docs/default-source/fellowship-services-documents/statement-of-fundamental-and-essential-truths.pdf?sfvrsn=153a1d6a_0

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God and the Trinity:

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