

Classics of Christian Thought

REL 4936

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Professor of Catholic Studies

Professor of Philosophy

Course description

This course is designed to introduce students to some of the “greatest hits” of Christian thought from the fourth century through the nineteenth. We begin with three formative works from the patristic era: *On the Incarnation of the Word*, by Athanasius (297-373); *On the Trinity*, by Augustine (354-430); and the *Rule of Benedict* (480-547). We then read three great medieval texts: *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Man), by Anselm (1033-1109); *Spiritual Friendship*, by Aelred of Rievaulx (1109-1167); and *Revelations of Divine Love*, by Julian of Norwich (1342-1413). For the Reformation and Early Modern period we examine the debate over freedom and grace between Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) and Martin Luther (1483-1546) and then turn to the poetry of George Herbert (1593-1633). We conclude with two influential American figures — Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), the great Calvinist theologian; and Phillips Brooks (1835-1893), considered the greatest American preacher of the nineteenth century.

Course requirements

- (1) Consistent, well-prepared participation in class discussion
- (2) One short (2- to 3-page) paper on some aspect of the material to be discussed in class, posted on Blackboard at least 24 hours in advance of the class session, along with three suggested questions for discussion
- (3) Midterm examination
- (4) Final examination

Grades will be weighted as follows

- (1) 15%
- (2) 15%
- (3) 30%
- (4) 40%

Any student may elect to do two of the assignments described in (2) above, in which case each of those assignments will be counted for 15% of the final grade and (1), (3), and (4) will be reduced by 5% each.

Texts

In the USF Bookstore

Aelred of Rievaulx. *Spiritual Friendship*. Cistercian Publications.
Athanasius. *On the Incarnation of the Word*. St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary.
Augustine. *On the Trinity, Books 8-15*. Cambridge University Press.
Benedict. *Rule*. Image Books.
Julian of Norwich. *Revelations of Divine Love*. Penguin.

On Blackboard

Anselm. *Cur Deus Homo*, in *Anselm: Basic Writings*. Hackett.
Brooks, Phillips. Selected sermons from *The Consolations of God*. Eerdmans.
Edwards, Jonathan. *Select Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*.
Erasmus, Desiderius. *On the Freedom of the Will*, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*.
Westminster John Knox.
Herbert, George. Selected poems from *The Temple*.
<http://www.ccel.org/h/herbert/temple/TempleFrames.html>
Luther, Martin. *On the Bondage of the Will*, in *Luther and Erasmus*.

Schedule of readings

(This is the schedule we followed in the Fall of 2007.)

M, 8/27 Introduction

Athanasius of Alexandria (297-373)

On the Incarnation of the Word

W, 8/29 Chapters I, II, and III (25-47)
M, 9/3 Labor Day holiday
W, 9/5 Chapters IV, V, and IX (48-64, 95-96)

Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

On the Trinity

M, 9/10 Books 8 and 9 (1-40)
W, 9/12 Books 10 and 11 (41-81)
M, 9/17 Books 12 and 13 (82-135)
W, 9/19 Books 14 and 15 (136-224)

Benedict of Nursia (480-547)

Rule

M, 9/24 Prologue and Chapters 1 through 30 (43-74)
W, 9/26 Chapters 31 through 73 (74-106)

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)

Cur Deus Homo

M, 10/1 Commendation of the Work to Pope Urban II, Preface, and Book One (237-239, 245-289)
W, 10/3 Book Two (290-326)

Aelred of Rievaulx (1109-1167)

Spiritual Friendship

M, 10/8 Prologue, Books One and Two (45-87)
W, 10/10 Book Three (91-132)

Julian of Norwich (1342-1413)

Revelations of Divine Love

M, 10/15 The Long Text, chapters 1-8, 11-15, 22-29 (41-53, 58-64, 72-82)
W, 10/17 The Long Text, chapters 37-40, 44-61 (93-98, 105-144)

M, 10/22 Midterm Examination

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)

On the Freedom of the Will

W, 10/24 Prefatory Observations, Introduction to the Disputation, and Part I: Scripture Passages that Support Free Choice (35-64)
M, 10/29 Part II: Scripture Passages that Seem to Oppose Free Choice, Part III: Examination of Luther's Arguments in His *Assertio*, and Epilogue (64-97)

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

On the Bondage of the Will

W, 10/31 Introduction, Part I: Review of Erasmus' Preface, Part II: Comments on Erasmus' Introduction (101-169)
M, 11/5 Part III: Refutation of Arguments in Support of Free Choice (169-219)
W, 11/7 Part V: Rebuttal of Erasmus' Critique of the *Assertio*, Part VI: A Display of the Forces on Luther's Side (263-332)
M, 11/12 Veterans Day holiday

George Herbert (1593-1633)

The Temple

- W, 11/14 The Five "Afflictions" Poems (linked from Blackboard)
M, 11/19 "The Banquet," "The Holy Communion," "Love (III)" (linked from Blackboard)

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

Selected sermons

- W, 11/21 "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," "God's Sovereignty in the Salvation of Men" (3-13, 51-62)
M, 11/26 "A Divine and Supernatural Light," "Christian Knowledge" (14-25, 195-207)

Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)

Selected sermons

- W, 11/28 "The Secret of the Lord," "The First Sunday in Advent" (1-22)
M, 12/3 "The Transfiguration of Christ," "The Tree of Life" (118-140)

W, 12/5 Wrap-up and final exam review

M, 12/10 Final examination, 10:30-12:30