

The Western Theological Tradition

Hillsdale College – REL 105

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Course Description in the College Catalog

A survey of the history of Western theology, analyzing and exploring the teachings of the various theological traditions that have influenced Western Civilization.

Given the dominant influence of Christianity on Western culture and society over the past 2000 years, the course makes clear the theological teachings of the major Christian traditions that have prospered and played a significant role in shaping Western societies. The connections between theology and notions of proper community and individual life, theology's influence on Western metaphysics and ethics, and the influence theology has had on the development of modern institutions and enterprises, such as modern science, are explored. In addition, the conceptual innovations about the nature of man and his abilities which theological disputes over the nature of God and Christ have provided are pointed out and discussed. Moreover, particular notions of the religious life and of the role of religion in life that have dominated Western thought on these matters are also explored.

In short, students are instructed in the basic teachings of that faith that has dominated and, until recently, to a large extent directed the course of Western civilization in order to understand how religious belief informs self-understanding, provides a comprehensive view of reality, and by instilling a vision of human life, its purpose and proper comportment, shapes the larger culture.

Finally, the course also examines thinkers and movements opposed to religion, focusing on intellectual disputes pitting religious faith against non-theistic, secular understandings of reality and mankind's place therein.

The Significance of Theology

Theology is literally “the study of God.” Three implications follow.

Theology is the *most important course* on campus, for what is more significant to study than God?

Theology is the *most relevant course* on campus, for as Maker and Ruler of all things, God is the context for everything, and context is critical for understanding.

Theology is the *most difficult course* on campus. As C. S. Lewis noted in *Mere Christianity* (Book IV, ch. 2), while inanimate and irrational beings are below us, and fellow human beings are on our level, who is able to grasp and examine invisible, spiritual realities, let alone God? As an infinite Being, His vastness eludes our grasp; as a personal Being, His accessibility must be graciously granted, not assumed or forced—and we must have the spiritual receptivity necessarily for a relationship with Him. Jesus said, “No one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matthew 11:27).

Therefore, three difficulties are facing us: the realities are *infinite* and *invisible*, God is *personal*, and we need *receptivity*. The last requirement is intensely personal. Just as knowing a friend is not a detached, intellectual study, but something that involves trust and interpersonal engagement with certain personal traits and relational affinities, so also knowing God depends heavily on what kind of person we are and on how we interact with Him—all of which must be given by God Himself, due to the limits of our nature. Because these requirements lie outside the realm of an academic course, it will be your decision how much “extra” you wish to seek beyond cognitive learning.

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable” (Psalm 145:3).

The Place of Theology

Interestingly, Christian theology appears among the articles of association in the constitution for Hillsdale College:

*Religious culture in particular shall be conserved by the College,
and by the selection of instructors and other practicable expedients,
it shall be a conspicuous aim to teach by precept and example
the essentials of the Christian faith and religion.*

—Article 6, “Articles of Association”

As an academic discipline, theology sits as “queen of the sciences.” Certainly, it has functioned this way in Western civilization until modern times. Now, however, theology (and religion in general) has been relegated to the realm of private, subjective feelings beyond objective analysis and in contrast to public knowledge, that is, “science.” It will be a large part of our course to reassess this science-religion dichotomy (also called the “fact-value split”) and to seek a more integrated approach that will prove useful in other disciplines and for practical life in general. Those least familiar with theology may be surprised how pertinent it can be for all areas of life.

Some moderns have objected, saying that theology is the illegitimate application of philosophy to religious experience. These moderns have a point. Theology is not the product of philosophy, which reasons up from the nature of things and is quite limited, as Job and Ecclesiastes attest. However, theology is also not the product of mere experience, devoid of rational thought. True theology is the product of **revelation**—of God *acting and talking to us*. Just as we understand the meaning of intentional action only through observation and explanation, so we understand God’s essential character through His own interpretation of His interconnecting actions.

Because revelation is essential for understanding any rational being, this course will be unapologetic in its use of Scripture—not as a mere proof text (though that can be enough, given God’s expert authority), but as His own personal communication to us of His purpose and intentions. *Because His word produces all things, and because His thoughts give meaning to all things, it is wise to build one’s thoughts around His word—incorporating all data into the framework of His revealed word.* “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10).

In addition, because Scripture has been the source of theological discussion in the church for two millennia, this course will also make liberal use of Christian teachers—not as a divine authority, but as divine gifts. In a sense, there is only one Teacher; we all have the privilege of looking at the notes of the “smart kids” in the room.

Welcome to the Western Theological Tradition!

Course Objectives

As a result of this course, students should be able to:

1. Identify the key persons and events in the Old Testament, New Testament, and church history.
2. Describe the issues debated at key points in this sacred history, with the help of memorable phrases.
3. Retrace the trends in culture behind these persons, events, and issues.
4. Assess past and contemporary trends in light of the patterns given in the Old and New Testaments.
5. Describe and assess the fact/value split between science and religion in contemporary culture.
6. Make a personal assessment about theology in general, and about Jesus Christ in particular.

Reading and Resources

For this course, the following materials are required:

1. Bible (preferably a readable Bible, such as the *English Standard Version*)
2. Means for taking notes
3. Reading material (see the bibliography)

Learning Activities and Assessments

Each of the following learning activities and assessments has assigned points that add up to the final course grade.

Attendance – 1 extra point for perfect attendance

The final grade for the course may be reduced by a full letter grade for excessive tardiness, excessive departures from class, or excessive absences (e.g. over 20% absent, for any reason). A correlation is not uncommon between excessive absences and failed exams, and between excessive tardiness and a lack of participation in class.

Participation – 10 points

True learning does not take place without *active learning*. Students must “own” their education. Note-taking and self-preparation for tests are expected. Students should not expect to receive handouts, complete notes on the board, or study guides. Students are also expected to ask questions in class and to engage in conversation with fellow students. Class participation will be regularly tracked and assessed (based on 80% participation rate).

Note: *Credit for participation is not based as much upon the soundness of questions asked or of answers offered, as upon the degree of pertinence to the discussion and of interaction with the class.*

Assigned Readings – 20 points

Each class has assigned reading, to be read in the order listed in the syllabus. These readings are graded pass/fail, based upon whether they were read in full or not. At roll, students are asked to respond truthfully about completion of the reading.

Writing Assignments – 40 points

Students write essays and book reviews. An essay captures and expands upon thoughts generated from something in the reading assignment. A book review identifies the genre and theme of a book and then critiques its central argument. For specific instructions, see the guides provided at the end of this syllabus.

Both essays and reviews are submitted with an attached list of “posies,” which are interesting quotes from the assigned readings. Each posy must include its page number. Additional comments are optional, but encouraged.

For each day of assigned readings, students must add at least three posies to their list. When a writing assignment is turned in, only the latest batch of posies is due (see the boxed areas on the reading schedule).

All written work must be emailed by the time of class on the day it is due.
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Note: *Essays and book reviews will not be graded on whether the instructor agrees with the point of view, but on whether the student has thoughtfully engaged with the material and articulated a position well.*

Tests – 30 points

The course has two tests—a midterm exam (10 points) and a comprehensive final exam (20 points). Each test covers both reading assignments and classroom lectures and discussion. **To pass this course, a student *must* pass the final exam, regardless of the overall percentage grade.** (For the final exam date, see the schedule below.)

Late Work – 20% penalty

Most assignments are due on the next day of class, but check with the assignment schedule below for the exact date. Assignments reported or turned in late are deducted twenty percentage points. *To receive credit for late work, students must take the initiative to report it without being asked.* After one week, no late work will be accepted, and the score will be a zero in the grade book.

Extra Credit – 1, 2, or 3 points

Bonus credit will be given to a quality double-spaced, five-page (maximum) research paper on a major person, event, or topic in the Western theological tradition. The paper must incorporate at least five *scholarly* articles or books beyond class reading. The amount of extra credit given will be determined by the quality of the research and presentation. *Extra credit cannot make up for missing assignments.*

Academic Honesty

“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).

In this class, we will sharpen each other—professor to student, student to student, and student to professor. Just as a high-speed-steel cutting tool in industry strongly affects a rod of steel, yet is affected by the rod all along, so also in a professor-student relationship, the professor may have the greater impact, but he himself is influenced by the student. This dynamic is certainly present in this course—and the professor thanks God for this interaction.

Therefore, in order to sharpen each other well, let us purpose together to be honest with each other—not merely to avoid cheating or plagiarism, but to speak our mind in a straight-forward, respectful manner—not trying to appear smarter than we are, but with sincerity of mind. As a human being answerable to Jesus Christ someday, this professor cannot act as if he does not believe the things he teaches. I *do* believe these things. They *are* true. Therefore, I aim to profess my faith with you—after all, I am a *professor*—and I ask you to do the same with me.

With that in mind, let me add two things.

First, I believe the material speaks for itself. If the Bible is *God’s* word, it does not need man’s help, whether from a government’s sword or from classroom manipulation.

Second, even if we were in church (and we are not), and even if I were the apostle Paul himself (and I *definitely* am not), I would still not be allowed to “lord it over your faith” (2 Corinthians 1:24). The Bible is a strong advocate of liberty of conscience under God, saying things like, “Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind” and “The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God” (Romans 14:5, 22). Therefore, I also aim to make this class an open discussion where your faith is respected. In the end, we may disagree, but we will (hopefully) *respectfully* disagree. Besides, I think it is to your advantage in building your own position to hear the strength behind an opposing belief than for a so-called “professor” to hide it from you in the name of respect.

Could it be that this policy is one form of defending liberty for the sake of *another person’s* pursuit of truth?

Reading and Resources

For this course, the following materials are required:

1. Bible (preferably a readable Bible, such as the *English Standard Version*)
2. Means for taking notes
3. Reading material (see the bibliography)

For help in writing your papers, please consider the Writing Center. Tutors are available in person or virtually via Zoom. To sign up, visit Handshake on the campus portal.

All lectures have been prerecorded and are available at [Sermon Audio](#) under “Bob Snyder” or “Spring Branch Academy.” It is *not* advised that students should substitute the audio version for the live presentation; however, as a supplement, the audio version aides in review and provides access to the lecture for those who miss class due to illness or athletics. **If physically able, those who test positive with COVID-19 should attend class via Zoom and communicate their participation questions via email.** Each lecture also has a pdf for class notes, which may be downloaded and printed for class. Please consider this resource, especially if you have difficulty taking quick notes.

Disclaimer

This syllabus borrows some of its wording and ideas from a model syllabus that Dr. Mark E. Simpson distributed in a teaching methods course at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. This syllabus provides students with a guideline of what to expect in this course. The professor retains the right to modify any portion of this syllabus, if the action would benefit the students and honor God.

Class	Topic	Assignment
1	Course Introduction	Scheindlin, <i>The Book of Job</i> , The Book of Job (Read only the translation, not the end notes.)
2	Wisdom Literature: Job	Scheindlin, <i>The Book of Job</i> , Introduction Ecclesiastes
3	Scheindlin, <i>The Book of Job</i>	Review: Scheindlin, <i>The Book of Job</i> (Introduction)
4	Modernity: Science	Thornbury, “Assessment of Schaeffer on Aquinas” Schaeffer, <i>Escape from Reason</i> , chs. 1-3
5	Wisdom Literature: Ecclesiastes	Schaeffer, <i>Escape from Reason</i> , chs. 4-7 Aquinas, <i>Summa contra Gentiles</i> , 1.3-4, 7-8
6	Origins: Biological Evolution	Wells, “Darwin’s Straw God Argument”
7	Origins: Theistic Evolution	Wells, “Survival of the Fakest” Gould, “Impeaching a Self-Appointed Judge” Johnson, “Response to Gould” Ruse, “Transcript”
8	Origins: Intelligent Design	Meyer, “A Scientific History—and Philosophical Defense—of the Theory of Intelligent Design”
9	Genesis: Their Context, Our Context	Genesis 1-25
10	Genesis: The Seed Promise	Genesis 26-50
11	Genesis: The Patriarchs	Review: Meyer, “A Scientific History...”
12	Modernity: Higher Criticism	Exodus 1-24, 32-34; Deuteronomy 7
13	OT History: Exodus and Judges	1 Samuel
14	OT History: The King Question	2 Samuel & Psalms 89, 110
15	OT History: Kings and Covenants	Isaiah 36-55
16	Modernity: Historicism	Jeremiah 25, 31, Habakkuk, Daniel, Malachi
17	OT History: The Reset of Empires	Essay: Thoughts on Scripture Readings
	Review	Study for Midterm Exam
	Midterm Exam	Mark
18	Modernity: The Synoptic Problem	Machen, <i>Christianity & Liberalism</i> , chs. 1-2 Matthew 5-7 (The Sermon on the Mount)

(This collection of posies continues to the next page.)

19	Jesus Christ: The Son of God	Machen, <i>Christianity & Liberalism</i> , chs. 3-5 John 1, 5
20	Jesus Christ: The Lamb of God	Machen, <i>Christianity & Liberalism</i> , chs. 6-7 John 13-17
21	Jesus Christ: The Apostle of God	Review: Machen, <i>Christianity & Liberalism</i>
22	The Circumcision Controversy	Acts 1-2, 15, Galatians, Romans
23	Judaism, Gnosticism, and the Canon	1 Peter, Pliny's Letter, Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians, The Martyrdom of Polycarp, Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Chalcedonian Creed, Athanasian Creed
24	Athanasius: Eastern Christianity	Athanasius, <i>On the Incarnation</i> , Preface, Sections 1-32
25	The Trinity, Incarnation, and Creeds	Athanasius, <i>On the Incarnation</i> , Sections 33-57
26	Augustine: Western Christianity	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , Books VII and VIII
27	Monks, Mystics, and Missions	Patrick, <i>Confessions</i> Anselm, <i>Cur Deus Homo</i> , Letter to Urban II through Book I.4
28	Developments in the Papacy	Anselm, <i>Cur Deus Homo</i> , Books I.19-25 and II.1-9
29	Faith and Reason in Scholasticism	Essay: Thoughts on Patristic and Medieval Readings
30	The Indulgence Controversy	Luther, <i>The Ninety-Five Theses</i> Luther, <i>Freedom of a Christian</i> <i>Extra Credit:</i> Introduction and Letter to Pope Leo X
31	Martin Luther and Christian Liberty	Calvin & Sadoletto, <i>Reformation Debate</i> , Letters (Skip the Introduction.)
32	Reformed Christianity	Calvin & Sadoletto, <i>Reformation Debate</i> , Appendix
33	The Justification Controversy	Essay: Thoughts on Reformation Readings
34	Developments in English Christianity	Edwards, <i>Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God</i>
35	Pietism and the Evangelical Revivals	Delbanco, <i>Real American Dream</i> , Prologue, ch. 1
36	William Carey and Global Missions	Delbanco, <i>Real American Dream</i> , ch. 2
37	The Bible Controversy	Delbanco, <i>Real American Dream</i> , ch. 3
38	Modernity: Civil Rights and Sexuality	Review: Delbanco, <i>Real American Dream</i>

Annotated Bibliography

Athanasius. [On the Incarnation](#). Trans. John Behr. Popular Patristics Series Number 44B. Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011.

This Greek classic of Eastern Christianity offers two reasons why the divine Logos had to become man.

In doing so, the author gives a defense of Christianity toward both Jews and Gentiles, in light of divine power.

Through this book, students can learn firsthand how Eastern Christianity differs from Western Christianity.

Online Version: [On the Incarnation](#) (archaic language and lacking the preface by C. S. Lewis and the introduction)

ISBN 978-0-88141-427-1

Augustine. [Confessions](#). Trans. Henry Chadwick. Oxford World's Classics. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

This Latin classic of Western Christianity gives public acknowledgement to Christ for the author's life story.

The idea of "confession" comes from Psalm 118:1, and includes both confession of sin and profession of faith.

Students will only read a portion of this classic, but should sense its depth and beauty immediately.

Through this book, students can learn firsthand of the humility theme in Western Christianity.

ISBN 978-0-19-953782-2

Calvin, John and Jacopo Sadoletto. [A Reformation Debate: Sadoletto's Letter to the Genevans and Calvin's Reply, with an Appendix on the Justification Controversy](#). Trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley. Ed. John C. Olin. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976 [1966].

This book presents two written appeals for the city of Geneva to adopt a religion—Protestant or Catholic.

The authors are good representatives of the two sides in the debates; Calvin, in particular, is very influential.

The appendix is worth the price of the book: justification in Calvin's *Institutes* and in the Council of Trent.

Students can assess for themselves firsthand the debate and reply which side would have been more persuasive.

Online Version: [A Reformation Debate](#) (full text)

ISBN 978-0-8010-2390-3

Delbanco, Andrew. [The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope](#). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

This book is a modern jeremiad by a Humanities professor at Columbia University.

American history is presented as three eras, each by the predominant cultural preoccupation—God, nation, self.

The author despises the first era, laments the third, and wishes for a return to the second era.

As a mirror on society, this book allows students to reflect on their own selfishness and cultural conformity.

Although a bit crude in places, the book adequately reflects where Western religion has arrived today.

Note: The full text is available electronically through Mossey library's link to ProQuest Ebook Central.

ISBN 978-0-674-00383-5

Edwards, Jonathan. [Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God](#). Intro. John D. Currid. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992 [1741].

This famous sermon was actually preached twice with little visible effect before being preached at Enfield, Connecticut with great effect. It remains one of the most famous sermons in American history and a great call to seek personal safety in Christ from the coming wrath of God.

Alternate Online Edition: Edwards, Jonathan. [Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God](#).

ISBN 978-0-87552-233-3

[ESV Premium Gift Bible](#). Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.

Students may use a Bible of their choice, but if they do not have one, this is a readable modern translation.

ISBN 978-1-4335-4827-7

Luther, Martin. [The Freedom of a Christian](#). Trans. Mark D. Tranvik. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008 [1520].

This classic presents Luther's theme of gospel freedom in a very positive light, for Luther and for his times.

Addressed to the pope as a personal appeal, Luther explains how faith and love look in a Christian's experience.

Important in history, the book shows that freedom from spiritual abuse was at the heart of the Reformation.

Online Version: [On the Freedom of a Christian](#) (archaic language and lacking the introduction)

ISBN 978-0-8006-6311-7

Machen, J. Gresham. [Christianity & Liberalism](#). Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009 [1923].
The author was a Greek scholar, a patron of the arts, and an apologist of New Testament Christianity.
This American classic uses the gospel to show that liberalism is revived paganism, not a version of Christianity.
ISBN 978-0-8028-6499-4

Meyer, Stephen C. “[A Scientific History - and Philosophical Defense - of the Theory of Intelligent Design.](#)”
Religion-Staat-Gesellschaft: Journal for the Study of Beliefs and Worldviews 7 (2006): 203-48.
This article uses both history and ideas to defend the scientific status of the intelligent design movement.

Schaeffer, Francis A. [Escape from Reason](#). IVP Classics. Reprint, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006 [1968].
This little book traces the history of the fact-value split epitomized today in public science vs. private religion.
Although criticized, Schaeffer is correct in tracing the distinction between theology and philosophy to Aquinas.
ISBN 978-0-8308-3405-1

Scheidlin, Raymond P. [The Book of Job](#). New York: W. W. Norton, 1998.
The author is a Jewish scholar of medieval Hebrew poetry, who offers a fresh translation of the biblical book.
Students can taste both the beauty of Hebrew poetry and be introduced to so-called higher criticism of the Bible.
ISBN 978-0-393-31900-2

Optional Follow-Up Reading

Wisdom Literature

For a good follow-up to Scheindlin’s book, see James A. Adams, [War Psalms of the Prince of Peace](#), which discusses the difficult imprecatory psalms in a way faithful to Christ.

Francis Schaeffer

Escape from Reason is actually a shorter version of Schaeffer’s book [The God Who Is There](#). For a contemporary book that extends Schaeffer’s fact-value analysis into current culture, see Nancy Pearcey, [Saving Leonardo](#).

Old Testament

The kind of theology that puts the whole Bible together into one story is called “biblical theology.” One author who has written a lot on this topic is the Australian Graeme Goldsworthy. His book *Gospel and Kingdom* is a great introduction, but it is (unfortunately) out of print. Another affordable option is [According to Plan](#), which includes additional material that I have not examined, but it looks promising.

J. Gresham Machen

A good follow-up to *Christianity & Liberalism* is Machen’s book *What Is Faith?* It also is currently out-of-print, but perhaps through a library or a used bookseller, it can be obtained. Similar books include Anglican John R. W. Stott’s [Basic Christianity](#) and, to a lesser extent, C. S. Lewis’s [Mere Christianity](#), which is very good on theism and ethics, but less trustworthy on the atonement and on the process of Christian transformation.

Church History

The survey of theologians given in class comes from Etienne Gilson’s *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*, which is out-of-print but easily obtained through the library. For further patristic reading, please read Gregory Nazianzen’s [On God and Christ](#). For a primer on Trinitarian theology, see Michael Reeves, [Delighting in the Trinity](#). Also, on Vatican II, John O’Malley’s [What Happened at Vatican II](#) proved very helpful.

Modern Culture

For a follow-up to Delbanco’s *The Real American Dream*, see Eric Foner, [The Story of American Freedom](#). Foner was a colleague of Delbanco’s at Columbia University in the humanities department. Regarding sexual morality in our time, see Denny Burk, [What Is the Meaning of Sex?](#) For morality in general and a good supplement to Luther’s *Freedom of the Christian*, see Andy Naselli and J. D. Crowley’s little book [Conscience](#), which has insights that perfectionistic people like myself often find quite liberating. *God be praised!*

Online Resources

Lecture 4

Thornbury, Gregory Alan. [Assessment of Francis Schaeffer on Thomas Aquinas](#). *SBTJ* 6 (Summer 2002): 76-78.

Note: Download the pdf and then scroll to pages 76-78 for the Thornbury discussion.

Lecture 5

Aquinas, Thomas. [Summa contra Gentiles 1.3-4, 7-8](#).

Lecture 6

Wells, Jonathan. [Darwin's Straw God Argument](#). *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 22 (2010): 67-88.

Lecture 7

Wells, Jonathan. [Survival of the Fakest](#). *The American Spectator* (December 2000 / January 2001).

Note: To download the original article, click on "ORIGINAL AT THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR."

Gould, Stephen Jay. "Review: Impeaching a Self-Appointed Judge." *Scientific American* (July 1992), pp. 118-21.

Note: Unavailable online. Please use Mossey Library's access to JSTOR to find a pdf of the original article.

Johnson, Phillip E. [Response to Gould](#).

Ruse, Michael. [Transcript: Speech by Professor Michael Ruse](#). 1993 Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Lecture 8

Meyer, Stephen C. [A Scientific History - and Philosophical Defense - of the Theory of Intelligent Design](#).

Note: If the hyperlink does not work, please enter www.discovery.org/a/7471 and then download the pdf.

Lecture 23

Pliny. [Letter to Trajan](#)

Polycarp. [To the Philippians](#)

[The Martyrdom of Polycarp](#)

[Apostles' Creed](#)

[Nicene Creed](#)

[Chalcedonian Creed](#)

[Athanasian Creed](#)

Lecture 27

Patrick of Ireland. [Confession](#). Link: www.confessio.ie/etexts/confession_english#.

Note: For a good translation with the Latin text, see Máire B. de Paor, *Patrick: The Pilgrim Apostle of Ireland*.

Anselm of Canterbury. [Cur Deus Homo, Book I](#).

Lecture 28

Anselm of Canterbury. [Cur Deus Homo, Book I](#) and [Cur Deus Homo, Book II](#).

Lecture 30

Luther, Martin. [The Ninety-Five Theses](#).

Writing an Essay
REL 105 – Dr. Snyder

We read not only to know, but also to *think*. Therefore, reading should often lead to writing.

To encourage this habit, you will write some essays upon topics generated from your reading in this course. An essay is literally a mental test of the strength of your own mind, expressed in an exploratory style:

“In the essay style, successive clauses and sentences are not produced by an overarching logic, but by association; the impression the prose gives is that it can go anywhere in a manner wholly unpredictable.”
—Stanley Fish, *How to Write a Sentence*, p. 62

The topics for your essay must be generated by something in the assigned reading. The best essays come from a trail of thought that was triggered by some detail or insight gained through reading. To develop this trail, you are encouraged to “pick your posies” from the text (quotations or insights that you want to pocket) and “press them” in your notes, citing the page number and persons involved. This practice will help both your recall and citation.

The essay is composed of **two paragraphs**:

The **first paragraph** introduces your topic in a way that will entice your reader to read more. In this paragraph, you must include the specific quotation or information in the reading that piqued your interest and generated your own thoughts. Often implied is a problem generated by the topic—that is, your topic has human interest because it will help solve problems or answer questions that others often face.

The **second paragraph** gives your own views on the topic. You must offer at least three points that support your perspective. These points can (and probably will) include other details from the reading or from other books, such as the Bible. At the end of the essay, conclude by stating your main point again, and by showing why it is important for the reader to know your main point.

The **format** of the essay is:

Layout: typed, 10-point font, one-inch margins, double-spaced

Length: 400-word minimum, one-page maximum length (including the bibliography)

Title: centered and bold, with your name on the next line (not in bold) and with no line spacing in between

Bible Quotations: cite the biblical book, chapter, and verse in parentheses

“Wisdom is better than strength” (Ecclesiastes 9:16).

Other quotations: cite the author, a short form of the title, and the page number in parentheses

“The lives of men are transformed by a piece of news” (Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, 48).

For repeated quotations from the same book, use the Bible reference or the page numbers in parentheses.

At the bottom of the page, include a bibliography of any non-biblical sources cited in the essay:

Source: Machen, J. Gresham. *Christianity and Liberalism*. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009 [1923].

Grading will be based on both the content and the form of the essay. In content, you should demonstrate the three levels of intelligence—*knowledge* (facts with interesting and salient details), *understanding* (discerning the difference between two similar items of the same class), and *wisdom* (the ability to apply creatively what you have learned to real-life situations). In form, you should demonstrate both *eloquence* (the force of argument, based a lot upon the arrangement of ideas) and *elegance* (the beauty of your prose).

Please note: *Your essay will not be graded on whether I agree with your position or not, but on how well you interact with an idea from the reading material. This is a conversation, in which I will grade you based on performance, and then answer you personally based on my own thoughts and beliefs.*

If you have any questions, please let me know. In the end, you should appreciate having a written record of your journey through the material of this course. **Also, remember to attach your list of posies from the readings.**

Writing a Book Review

REL 105 – Dr. Snyder

Much of education consists of reading books. Even God communicated His mind through a book, the *Bible*, which literally means “book.” The mere reading of books, however, is not sufficient in itself for knowledge. Many people read books and then forget what they read. Others retain what they read, but then fail to talk about it, either with God in prayer or with fellow human beings. Either way, much of the benefit from reading is lost.

Writing a good book review provides a way for you to remember more and to interact more with others. The following guide offers a simple outline for writing such a review. The book review consists of four paragraphs, which are described under the four underlined headings. When finished, the review and its bibliography should be more than 800 words in length, but less than two typed pages (10-point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins). It should also have several appropriate quotes from the book (with the page number of the quote in parentheses).

The Author’s Story

- The first sentence gives both the *genre* of the book and its *subject*:
“*Big Book* by Joe Author is a *military history* about *life during the Civil War*.”
- The next sentence gives the main character or subject of the book:
“The story focuses on the experiences of Billy Smith, a boy living on a southern plantation.”
- The rest of the paragraph provides a general outline of the book or plot without spoiling the end.

The Author’s Point

- The first sentence gives the *thesis* of the book:
“In *Big Book*, Joe Author argues that *adversity brings real prosperity*.”
- The rest of the paragraph gives the author’s argument for his thesis.
“The author attempts to prove his point in three ways. First,…”
- Be sure to differentiate between what the author *assumes* and what he *asserts*.

Your Analysis

- The first sentence tells your overall opinion of the book’s argument:
“Joe Author makes a good apology for adversity, but misses out on two details.”
- The rest of the paragraph offers your detailed analysis of the book’s argument:
Begin with the author’s point of view and draw out its logical implications.
Then make your own assertions and back them up with reasons.
- Your analysis must include details of where you agree and where you disagree:
You may both agree and disagree—or even agree but not appreciate how the thesis is proven.
Even if you generally agree with the book, you must give your reasons why you agree.
- As the recipient of another’s work, it is honorable to begin with the merits of a book, not its faults.

Your Suggestions

- The first sentence offers your overall assessment of the book:
“*Big Book* is a challenging book to read, but well worth the effort.”
“Although controversial, *Big Book* makes points that need to be considered today.”
Note: Here you may include your personal reactions to the book (e.g. distasteful, delightful, etc.).
- The paragraph may offer suggestions on how the book could be useful to others (“So what?”):
“*Big Book* will really help those in a personal crisis.”
- The paragraph may offer suggestions for further research, even your own research (“What next?”):
“*Big Book* opens up two areas for further exploration. First,…”

At the end of your review, include a bibliography of the book reviewed and of any other non-biblical sources cited:
Source: Author, Joe. *Big Book: Living and Dying in the Civil War*. New York: Scribbles, 2019.

Please note: Your book review will not be graded on whether I agree with your position or not, but on how well you understand and interact with the argument of the book, both in assessing its truth and in making notes for further scholarship. This is a conversation, in which I will grade you based on performance, and then answer you personally based on my own thoughts and beliefs. **Also, remember to attach your list of posies from the readings.**