

THEO 205  
***Introduction to Christian Theology***

**Messiah College  
Jterm 2018**

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**Professor:** Devin Manzullo-Thomas  
**Email:** dcthomas@messiah.edu  
**Class Time:** MTWHF, 1:00-4:00 p.m.  
**Class Location:** Boyer 331

**Office:** Boyer 101E  
**Phone:** Ext. 5235  
**Office Hours:** Tues., 12:00-1:00 p.m.  
Wed., 9:00-10:30 a.m.

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**Course Description**

This course fulfills a QuEST requirement for Christian Beliefs. The catalog description reads as follows:

**A survey course dealing with the history and present expressions of classic Christian understandings of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, humanity, creation, redemption, etc. Issues of theological method are introduced, especially as this relates to the integration of faith and learning in various academic disciplines.**

Of course, there are many ways to study Christian theology. In this course, we will examine it historically. Our approach will be chronological, surveying Christian thought from the time of Jesus to the present and focusing in on several important turning points in the development of the Church. In this sense, our class may feel like a history course. At the same time, the stuff of Christian history that we'll be exploring is theological content as articulated by various Christian thinkers and movements. We'll learn to know the actors and their historical contexts, which will in turn help us to understand the details of their arguments.

Along the way, we'll also explore the differences and similarities between the major Christian traditions—Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox—and between different denominations. We will also connect these broader themes to our own theological convictions and spiritual practices, in order to better understand how we come to believe what we believe (or do not believe) about Christian faith. In other words, we will not only learn the arguments of others but also make some arguments of our own. I'll require you to respond to the arguments we encounter along the way, consider whether you agree or disagree with them, and offer some alternative views.

One last thing: Because this is a QuEST course, my course plan is based on three assumptions: (1) Most of you are taking this course to meet a QuEST requirement; (2) Most of you have had little or no formal theological training; and (3) Most of you won't take another theology course during your Messiah College careers. These assumptions

mean that I'll teach this course at an introductory level. I'll start from the bottom up, define theological jargon when I use it and keep it to a minimum, and do my best to create an environment in which questions and conversations are always welcome.

I'm glad you're in my class, and I look forward to spending time with you in the weeks ahead. I hope you learn a lot—from the readings, written assignments, class lectures, and discussions. I also hope the things you learn in this course will be useful for your own journey of faith.

### **Course Goals & Methods of Assessment**

By the end of this course, you will have demonstrated to me that you have successfully achieved all of the course goals listed below. The extent of your success in achieving those goals will determine the final grade that you receive for the course (A–F). In the chart below, I list each of the course goals and then indicate which of our course requirements I'll use to determine whether or not you have successfully achieved a given goal.

All of this may sound very cold, formal, and structured—and, to a certain extent, it is. Rest assured that the class itself won't be as cold, formal, and structured as this chart may suggest. Former students have told me that they really enjoy this course and my teaching method. Most importantly, they have told me that they get a lot out of this course—in other words, that they learn a lot. My responsibility as the instructor is to make sure that your learning, as students, matches the goals that I and my department have set for this course. Thus, the chart.

<b><u>Course Goal</u></b>	<b><u>Method(s) of Assessment</u></b>
A. Practice theological ways of thinking and writing	Reflection Journals, Group Presentation
B. Articulate central beliefs of historic Christian faith about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, and the church	Discussions, Pop Quizzes, Exams, Group Presentations
C. Recognize Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan theological emphases, such as compassion, peace, justice, reconciliation, and the importance of personal piety	Discussions, Pop Quizzes, Exams
D. Recognize that the Christian faith can be articulated in many ways	Discussions, Pop Quizzes, Exams, Reflection Journals
E. Examine your own theological convictions and spiritual practices	Reflection Journals

## Course Texts

González, Justo L. *Church History: An Essential Guide*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1996. ISBN 978-0687016112

Noll, Mark A. *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2012. ISBN 9780801039966

\* NOTE: In addition to our primary texts, several short readings will be made available through our Canvas course site.

\*\* NOTE: Students are also required to own and occasionally bring to class a copy of the Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Online Bible tools, such as the Oremus Bible Browser (<http://bible.oremus.org/>) use the NRSV translation.

## Course Delivery

Most of the content in this class will be delivered in lectures. However, although this class isn't a seminar *per se*, class discussion will constitute a significant portion of the course. Sometimes we'll discuss ideas and issues as a whole class, and other times we'll break into smaller groups of three or four students. In both contexts—the small groups and the larger classroom—please be honest but tactful, sensitive but forthright, as you express your opinions.

## Course Requirements

In order to get the most out of this class, you must:

1. **Attend class consistently.** In-class lectures and large- and small-group discussions will constitute the basis for our learning in this course. For that reason, you are expected to attend class each and every day.
2. **Participate in class discussions.** Everyone is expected to contribute to our discourse, whether in large- or small-group settings.
3. **Read the assigned material before class.** Course texts are essential to learning in this class. Lectures will supplement the readings. Our discussions, which will constitute parts of most class periods, will operate on the assumption that you've read the readings carefully.
4. **Take notes.** Detailed notes on each lecture, class discussion, guest presentation, and media presentation will come in handy on the exams—so make sure you take them regularly. Laptops are allowed for note-taking purposes, but see the note below re: use of technology for more on laptops in the classroom.

5. **Maintain a reflection journal.** Each day of class, I'll offer a reflection question or two that will help you to synthesize, wrestle with, and respond to the week's readings and lectures. The point of these questions and your responses to them is to give you time and space to think, in preparation for large- and small-group discussion that will happen during our class sessions. We'll also use the journals for in-class writing, in preparation for discussions or group activities. Always bring your journal to class with you.
6. **Be prepared for pop quizzes.** To help you keep up with course readings, I'll occasionally require you to take a pop quiz. These quizzes will test the depth of your engagement with the reading assignments, and will not be announced ahead of time.
7. **Give a group presentation on another critical "turning point" in Christian history.** For the purposes of this assignment, you'll be assigned to a group and asked to make a compelling, informative, and engaging 10-minute presentation on a turning point in the history of Christianity that we have not discussed in class. Additional details about this assignment will be distributed in class.
8. **Complete two exams (midterm and final).** Anything covered in this course—including readings, lectures, videos, discussions, and student presentations—is fair game for the exams. So you'll need to be an engaged learner at all times.

## **Grading**

I'll calculate your final grade for this course based on the following items:

- **Attendance and Participation.** Class participation is worth 50 points. If you attend class every day, you'll receive at least 40 of these points. However, only those who participate actively and regularly in class will receive 45 points or more. In addition to being present and engaged, active participation means entering fully into classroom activities (e.g., small group activities) and contributing verbally to classroom discussions.
- **Pop Quizzes.** Throughout the semester, you'll take a total of five (5) pop quizzes. Each quiz will be worth 10 points, for a total of 50 points.
- **Reflection Journals.** You can earn a total of 100 points for these reflections.
  - Your journal responses should show that you've both read and mentally digested the assigned material, and that you've synthesized and wrestled with that material. By and large, the answers you provide should be in your own words. You may include short quotations from the readings, but the quotations must be in quotation marks, and they should be brief and relatively few in number.

- So that I can read what you're thinking about course context and so that I can keep you accountable, I'll collect your journals four (4) times throughout the term. You can skip up to four (4) questions throughout the semester—one question per collection—without losing points.
- My grade will be based on the quality, consistency, and completeness of your reflections.
- **Presentation.** The presentation is worth 100 points.
- **Exams.** Both of the exams are worth 100 points each.

Thus, your final grade for this course will be determined as follows:

Attendance/Participation & Quizzes	20%
Presentation	20%
Reflection Journal	20%
Exam 1	20%
Exam 2	20%

Your course letter grade will be assigned according to the following percentages:

93-100	A	77-79	C+
90-92	A-	73-76	C
87-89	B+	70-72	C-
83-86	B	67-69	D+
80-82	B-	60-66	D
		< 60	F

### **Laptop and Cell Phone Policy**

Laptops are welcome during class for note taking but not for other purposes. If you choose to use your laptop to take notes, you must email me a copy of your notes at the end of each class session.

If I determine or suspect that you are using your laptop for some purpose other than note taking, I will first discuss my concerns with you outside of class. If the misuse continues, I will cut your participation grade in HALF. Cell phone use is never permitted during class time.

### **Late Work Policy**

All assignments for THEO 205 are to be handed in on the due date identified in the syllabus. Late submissions, without my prior approval, will receive an appropriate point reduction. However, if you talk to me in advance of the due date and have a compelling reason, I am usually very lenient and willing to grant an extension. The important thing is that you talk to me first, not on the due date or after the fact.

### **Attendance Policy**

If you will be absent, please email me in advance of class. An excused absence due to illness requires a note from the Engle Center or other healthcare provider. You are allowed one (1) unexcused absence without a grade reduction. Additional unexcused absences will result in a participation grade deduction of two points per class missed.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

Any student whose disability falls within ADA guidelines should inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester of any special accommodations or equipment needs necessary to complete the requirements for this course. Students must register documentation with the Office of Disability Services (Murray Library). If you have questions, call extension 5382.

### **Schedule**

#### **Wednesday, January 10**

Class:

- Getting to Know One Another
- Syllabus Review
- Christian Theology as a Story

#### **Thursday, January 11**

Class:

- Becoming Christianity: The Fall of Jerusalem (70 CE)
- Discussion

**Readings:** Noll, ch. 1; Gonzalez, ch. 1

**Reflection Question:** In his chapter, Noll outlines three contributions that Christians from the early period of the church made to the generations that would follow: the canon (Scripture), the creeds, and the church order (episcopacy). *If you come from a church background:* Which of these three contributions has the biggest impact on your local church? What does that tell you about your particular tradition and what it values? *If you do not come from a church background:* Which one of these seems to have the biggest impact on the Christians you know? Why do you think that is?

## Friday, January 12

### Class:

- Christendom and Its Discontents: The Edict of Milan (313 CE)
- Discussion

**Readings:** Gonzalez, ch. 1 (re-read); Gonzalez, “The Great Persecution & Final Victory” (Canvas); Gonzalez, “Constantine” (Canvas); Noll, ch. 5 (esp. pages 114-118)

### Reflection Questions: *Answer both.*

- From what you can tell from reading the two short readings (not book chapter) by Gonzalez, why was Constantine’s conversion an important turning point in the history of early Christianity?
- Was the development of Christendom a good or bad thing for the church? Are there remnants of Christendom still apparent in our society today? If so, what are they? If not, what has taken Christendom’s place?

## Monday, January 15

NO CLASS—Martin Luther King Jr. Day

## Tuesday, January 16

### Class:

- Christology in Dispute: The Councils of Nicaea (325 CE) and Chalcedon (451 CE)
- Discussion

**Readings:** Noll, chs. 2-3; Gonzalez, ch. 1 (re-read)

### Reflection Question: *Select one question and write in response to it.*

- In ch. 2, Noll discusses how the Roman and Christendom context of the early church influenced what Christians believed about the nature of God and Jesus Christ. First, how did this context influence and affect the church’s views at the time? Second, what influences in our culture(s) today impact our theology of God and Christ? Which of these current influences do you consider to be the most potentially dangerous, and why?
- In ch. 3, Noll describes the debate between Antiochene and Alexandrian Christians over the nature of Christ. As he explained, both of these groups within the early church have their own misrepresentations of Christ when taken to their extremes. First, describe these extremes. Then, discuss how Christians today sometimes can still encounter them when trying to explain the person of Jesus.

## Wednesday, January 17

### Class:

- Inventing the Canon: The Synods of Hippo and Carthage (393 and 397 CE)
- Discussion
- Other Turning Points presentations (#1-2)
- Review for Exam #1

**Readings:** Noll, ch. 1 (pgs. 25-30—re-read); Gonzalez, ch. 1 (re-read); Shelley, “The Rule of Books” (Canvas); Ehrman, “The Copyists of the Early Christian Writings” (Canvas)

**Reflection Question:** As much as Christians might wish it had, the New Testament did not just descend out of the sky, fully formed and ready for believers to read. Nor did it always have firm, clear boundaries marking it off from all other kinds of literature. In fact, the books of the NT were cobbled together over 200+ years, in a process that involved numerous church leaders, scribes, and even a few heretics. For these reasons, can Christians really have confidence in the text—its accuracy, its authority? Today’s readings provide different answers to that question. Describe each answer and then tell me which answer you find more convincing, and why.

**Due (In Class):** Reflection Journal

## Thursday, January 18

### Class:

- Exam #1
- Rescuing the Church: Benedict’s *Rule* (530 CE)

**Readings:** Noll, ch. 4; Gonzalez, ch. 2

**Reflection Question:** What legacy has monasticism left for the church today? Do you think that monasticism’s legacy is largely positive or negative? Why?

## Friday, January 19

### Class:

- East and West: The Great Schism (1054 CE)
- Discussion
- Other Turning Points presentations (#3-5)



**Readings:** Noll, ch. 6; Gonzalez, ch. 3 (re-read) and 4

**Reflection Question:** Was the schism of 1054 CE a good thing for the church, or a bad thing? When should Christians pursue unity? When is division a viable solution? Think of a contemporary example (or two) to support your view.

### Monday, January 22

Class:

- Inventing Protestantism: Martin Luther and the Diet of Worms (1521 CE)
- Discussion

**Readings:** Noll, ch. 7; Gonzalez, chs. 5-6

**Reflection Questions:** Authority has long been a concern for Christians, going back to the very origins of the religion in the first centuries and lasting all the way to the present. What authority should Christians turn to when it comes to their faith? Up until the time of Luther, what had served as the authoritative bases of the Christian church? (In other words, to what sources did Christians turn for authoritative answers for their faith?) What new element did Luther add to this list of authoritative bases?

**Due (In Class):** Reflection Journal

### Tuesday, January 23

Class:

- Reformation's Discontents: The English Act of Supremacy (1534 CE) and the Founding of the Jesuits (1540 CE)
- Discussion
- Other Turning Points presentations (#6-11)

**Readings:** Noll, chs. 8-9; Gonzalez, ch. 7

**Reflection Questions:** *Answer both.*

- What were the primary issues that tended to differentiate one brand of Protestantism from another? Do these issues still divide denominations today, or have they been replaced by other points of distinction?
- Does the work of Counter-Reformers such as Ignatius Loyola change your perspective on the legacy of monasticism (which you wrote about in your reflection journal on Jan. 17)? If so, why? If not, why not?

### Wednesday, January 24

Class:

- “Strangely Warmed”: The Conversions of the Wesleys (1738 CE)
- Discussion

**Readings:** Noll, ch. 10; Gonzalez, ch. 7 (re-read)

**Reflection Question:** Depending on your religious background, you may be more or less familiar with the concept of a “conversion.” Does your tradition expect that individuals will have a conversion experience at some point in their life? If yes, why? If no, why not?

**Due (In Class):** Reflection Journal

### Thursday, January 25

Class:

- The Beginning of the End of Christendom: The French Revolution (1789 CE)
- Discussion

**Readings:** Noll, ch. 11; Gonzalez, ch. 8

**Reflection Question:** For the first time in this course, we’ve looked at a purely secular event as a turning point in the history of Christianity. Did Christianity (not Christendom) benefit from the secularization of the West that began with the French Revolution and then spread? How are contemporary Christians directly impacted by the demise of Christendom/rise of secularization that occurred in these centuries?

### Friday, January 26

Class:

- “Weird Babel of Tongues”: The Azusa Street Revival (1906 CE)
- Discussion

**Readings:** Synan, “The American Jerusalem—Azusa Street” (Canvas); Gonzalez, chs. 8-9

**Reflection Question:** Yesterday we talked about the French Revolution and the ways in which it tried to restrain/limit the influence of Christendom in the West and thereby introduced secularism. After reading Synan’s description of the origins of Pentecostalism, reflect briefly on why a religious movement such as this one might have appeared at a time when secularism seemed to be on the rise. Why might we view Pentecostalism as a kind of response to the end of Christendom in the West?

**Monday, January 29**

Class:

- Battles for the Bible: The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy (1925 CE)
- Discussion

**Readings:** Corrigan and Hudson, *Religion in America* [excerpt] (Canvas); Olson, “Conservative Theology Hardens Traditional Categories” (Canvas); Gonzalez, chs. 8-9 (re-read)

**Reflection Question:** Olson describes four “common features” of fundamentalist theology. First, list those four features and describe each (1-2 sentences) in your own words. Second, write a short paragraph describing why the Christians whom Corrigan and Hudson refer to as “scientific modernists” might have disagreed with and eventually gone to “war” with fundamentalists. Third, sketch your personal reaction to Olson’s description of fundamentalism. Do you agree or disagree with this movement? Why or why not?

**Due (In Class):** Reflection Journal

**Tuesday, January 30**

Class:

- From “World Missions” to the Next Christendom: The Dominance of Global South Christianity (2025 CE)
- Discussion
- Other Turning Points presentations (#12-16)

**Readings:** Noll, ch. 12; Gonzalez, ch. 9 (re-read); Jenkins, “The Christian Revolution” (Canvas)

**Reflection Question:** Jenkins contends that the shift of Christianity’s center from the Global North (Europe, United States) to the Global South (Asia, Latin America, Africa) has “countless implications for theology and religious practice.” Briefly consider this turning point’s implications for missionary work. Traditionally, missionary work has been accomplished by Western nations in Europe and North America sending evangelists and others into “non-Christian” places such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Does this same model work at a time when these regions have a more substantial Christian population than the Global North? How should Western Christians revise their missionary paradigm in light of these developments?

**Tuesday, January 31**

Class:

- Turning Points and the Study of Christianity
- Exam #2

**Readings:** TBD