

DI-520 Introduction to Christianity: an interreligious and dialogical approach

Fall semester, 2025

Wednesdays, 7:00-8:50 (plus asynchronous requirements)

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Course description:

This course is designed to introduce non-Christians to the worldview of Christianity. We will examine the diversity of Christian denominations, the theology of Christian scripture (the Old and New Testaments), and the major theological beliefs of Christianity as lived out in different traditions and cultural practices. Special attention will be given to the Near Eastern origins and non-Western heritage of Christianity today. Students will be expected to respond with their own interreligious perspectives and evaluations of Christian concepts and beliefs. Students should have taken DI-550 Intro to Interreligious Studies as a pre-requisite.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will be able to identify the major families of Christian traditions
2. Students will have a working knowledge of the major terminology in Christian theology
3. Students will be able to articulate different Christian approaches to the Bible
4. Students will be able to articulate how Christians understand God's revelation is mediated to the world
5. Students will be able to analyze Christian theological perspectives from their own worldview

This course meets the following **Program Outcomes** for the **Master of Arts in Interreligious Studies**:

4. At the level needed to take part in substantive study, demonstrate knowledge of the theological and legal traditions within Judaism, *Christianity*, and Islam.
 1. Identify and explain the major tenets and religious worldviews of Christianity.
 2. Describe the major branches of Christianity.
5. Express your ideas and perspectives clearly in oral and written communication.
 1. Write sustained, coherent arguments or explanations in clear academic English, with well-formed sentences and paragraphs.

For the **Interreligious and Islamic Studies Specialization**, this course meets the requirements as an *elective*.

for the **Master of Arts in Chaplaincy** program this course meets the requirements as an *elective*.

Teaching and Learning Strategies:

This course will be hybrid synchronous. The instructor will be located at HIU with students present in the classroom, and distance students joining remotely. Each week, in addition to the required weekly reading, and the scheduled synchronous class time (7-9 pm ET), there will be **pre-class asynchronous activities** which will include posting one new idea/concept learned AND one question from the required reading PRIOR to the Wednesday class.

Hartford Values for Collaborative Teaching and Learning – the syllabus and course should model:

- Showing mutual appreciation and respect for others—modeling the privilege to learn from and partner with each other.
- Engaging in cross-disciplinary content and teaching
- Paying attention to the whole personhood of another – history, race, religion, knowledge, gender, and rank
- Demonstrating how to disagree respectfully and well
- Embodying mutuality – Learning to construct ideas and skills and experiences together

Required texts:

- McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 6th edition. Newark: Wiley, 2017.

Various assigned chapters from:

- Chapman, Stephen B., and Marvin A. Sweeney, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Gray, Patrick, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the New Testament*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
- Migliore, Daniel L. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Fourth edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023.

Course Assignments and assessment:

Assignment	Due Date(s)	Course Outcomes by assignment	% of course grade
1. Take the ungraded syllabus quiz	By Wednesday, September 10, 7 pm ET.		NA
2. Weekly class preparation (required reading and <u>pre-class asynchronous activities</u> , and contribution to class discussions,)	Participation will be assessed at the mid-point and endpoint of the course	1, 2, 3, 4 and 5	15%/15%
3. Mid-term (terms and essay questions)	Due by Wednesday, October 15, 7 pm ET	1, 2, and 3	20%
4. Report and presentation on visit to a Christian church/ministry	An initial proposal should be emailed by November 5; reports are to be submitted	2 and 4	30%

	prior to the assigned Wednesday class		
5. Final integrative essay	Due Wednesday, December 17, 7 pm ET	1, 4 and 5	20%

1. Students should read the syllabus carefully and take the **ungraded syllabus quiz** on the Canvas site. Completion of the quiz is necessary to unlock access to the Canvas modules. This should be completed by the **Wednesday, 10 September** BEFORE class.
2. Attend all of the synchronous sessions and class discussions, and the **pre-class asynchronous activities** which will include **posting one new idea/concept learned AND one question from the required reading**. Participation will be assessed at the first half of the course and again at the second half of the course. If you know you will be unable to attend a class session, please inform the professor in advance. (This assignment is **30% of the grade**, to be graded at the mid-point and final week of the semester.)
 - Pre-class asynchronous activities must be completed BEFORE the Wed. class session.
 - *In the case of an absence for a class session the professor will reserve the right to ask the student for a written assignment on the required reading for that session.*
3. A **Mid-term** will consist of 20 terms and several essay question prompts related to the required reading material and lectures covered in the course. Students will be graded on demonstration of engagement with both the assigned reading and awareness of the concepts and terminology covered in the first weeks of class. Students are not allowed to use any form of AI in this assignment. The instructor reserves the right to ask for an oral exam after submission. (This assignment is **20% of the grade.**)
 - The exam will be posted on **Friday, October 10** at 7 pm.
 - Students will have until **Wednesday, October 15** at 7 pm ET to submit their exams.
4. A **report and presentation on a site visit to a Christian community** should normally include attending a worship, prayer service or other public activity. Students should make arrangements well ahead of time for the visit. This includes finding a suitable church or community, checking the website for the leadership (including priest, pastor, or lay leader), and calling the church to introduce oneself. Dr. Grafton can provide a letter of introduction as needed. Group visits are allowed, but each student must submit their own report.

Students should provide an initial plan of visit via an email by Wednesday, 5 November at the latest.

Reports are due before the assigned Wednesday class presentation. Each presentation should be for 20 minutes, followed by time for discussion. The report should include

- a) The origin and historical background of the church,
- b) Description of the building and worship space,
- c) Theological identities and liturgical (or worship) emphases of the church,
- d) Overall description of and the student's reflection on the visit, including positive and negative aspects.

Students should submit a bibliography or any other resources they used to help them in their visit and report (inc. websites, electronic resources, ppt, or any handouts given to the class). (30% of the grade.)

5. Students will have the opportunity to explore scriptural, theological or sociological area of interest in a **final integrative essay** of 1,500-2,000 words. The essay must demonstrate that the student has engaged a particular Christian tradition with their own or another religious perspective, noting similarities and contrasts, and raising pertinent questions about the traditions. (This assignment is 20% of the grade.)
 - The paper is due by 7 pm ET on **17 December** and can be posted on the Canvas site.

Overview of the Course:

September 3: Introduction to the method and expectations of the course

Required Activity: Review the “Timeline of Christian traditions” chart in module 1; watch [“The First Christianity,”](#) (59 Minute episode #1 of Diarmaid MacCullough’s *A History of Christianity Series* (Available on *Kanopy* through the library website. Go to [“Resources”](#) then “film” then “Kanopy”).

Assignments: Take the ungraded syllabus quiz.

Sources of Revelation

September 10: Revelation: Jesus, Scripture, and Tradition

Required Activity: read McGrath, chap. 6, 7; watch [“Catholicism: The Unpredictable Rise of Rome”](#) (59 Minute episode #2 of Diarmaid MacCullough’s *A History of Christianity Series*).

Assignments: If you have not yet, complete ungraded syllabus quiz which is due before the start of the class; submit 1 new learning and 1 question to Canvas before class.

September 17: The Old Testament

Required Activity: read Chapman & Sweeny, chaps. 1, 2, 19

Assignments: submit 1 new learning and 1 question to Canvas before class

September 24: The New Testament

Required Activity: read Gray, chaps 1, 2, 17

Assignments: submit 1 new learning and 1 question to Canvas before class

October 1: Yom Kippur – NO CLASS

October 8: Scripture – “inspired” or “inerrant”

Required Activity: read Chapman & Sweeny, chaps. 6, 8; Gray 18, 19; [Chicago Statement on Inerrancy](#)

Assignments: submit 1 new learning and 1 question to Canvas before class

October 15: Non-Canonical Christian writings

Required Activity: browse <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/>

Assignments: **Mid-Term exam** will be available from Friday, 10 October and is due BEFORE class, on Wednesday, 15 October at 7 pm.

Christian Theological Themes

October 22: Jesus and Incarnation

Required Activity: read McGrath, chap. 10, 11; watch [“Orthodoxy: From Empire to Empire”](#) (58 Minute episode #3 of Diarmaid MacCullough’s *A History of Christianity Series*)

Assignments: submit 1 new learning and 1 question to Canvas before class
[October 27: Last day to withdraw from a course without academic penalty]

October 29: God as Trinity

Required Activity: read McGrath, chap. 13

Assignments: submit 1 new learning and 1 question to Canvas before class

November 5: The Church and the Sacraments

Required Activity: read McGrath, chaps. 15, 16; watch [“Reformation: The Individual Before God”](#) (59 Minute episode #4 of Diarmaid MacCullough’s *A History of Christianity Series*)

Assignments: submit a proposal of site-visit; submit 1 new learning and 1 question to Canvas before class

November 12: Salvation - Christianity and other religions

Required Activity: read McGrath, chaps. 17, 18

Assignments: submit 1 new learning and 1 question to Canvas before class

Contemporary issues within Global Christianity

November 19: “Fundamentalisms” and Charismatic movements

- The Rise of Pentecostal Christianity in Africa and Asia
- Christian Zionism
- American Christian Nationalism

Required Activity: watch [“Protestantism: The Evangelical Explosion.”](#) (59 Minute episode #5 of Diarmaid MacCullough’s *A History of Christianity Series*; [John Haggee: The Eye of God is on Israel](#) (36 mins)

Assignments: submission of assigned reports of site visits

November 26: Reading Week – NO CLASS

December 3: Theology “from below”

- Feminist and Queer theology (gender)
- Latin American/Black theologies (culture)
- Postcolonial theologies (politics)

Required Activity: read Daniel L. Migliore, ‘Confessing Christ in Context,’ in *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (William B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2014), chap. 9 [posted on Canvas as pdf]

Assignments: submission of assigned reports of site visits

December 10: Ecology and Eco-justice

Required Activity: read McGrath, chap. 14; Migliore, “Christ and Cosmos,” chap. 10 [posted on Canvas as pdf]

Assignments: submission of assigned reports of site visits

December 17: Final integrative essay due by 7 pm on Canvas site