

# **MBS 504 Contemporary Issues in Theology (Online Course)**

SUNSET INTERNATIONAL BIBLE INSTITUTE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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## **General Information**

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## **Course Description**

*Contemporary Issues in Theology* is a course that focuses attention on several broad categories within the larger context of Theology. Specifically, this course analyzes certain topics within the fields of ecclesiology, eschatology, Christology, soteriology, the trinity, and the nature and function of Scripture. A special emphasis will be given to awareness of the issues within these fields of theology and the gaining of additional knowledge and insights in the same.

## **Course Objectives**

- To engage the specific topics to be covered in an open and meaningful way so as to foster discussion among the group.
- To explore and investigate the topics, not so much to decide on a “correct” doctrine or position, but to be made aware of the discussions taking place in each of these areas and to contribute in a positive manner to that discussion.
- To help students gain further insights into these key theological areas by reading the assigned texts, reflecting on them, and commenting on them in class discussions.
- To encourage student articulation of thoughts and understandings while remaining sensitive and respectful to others.
- To assist the development of two practical disciplines in each student: (1) the habit of theological inquiry, the foundational task of all theology; (2) the ability to think theologically in everyday life and ministry situations.

**Course Textbooks (Required Reading)**

Daniel Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Eerdmans, 2014).

Everett Ferguson. *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Eerdmans, 1996).

Everett Ferguson. *The Early Church and Today, Vol. 1: Ministry, Initiation, and Worship* (ACU Press, 2012)

Kenneth L. Cukrowski, Mark W. Hamilton, and James W. Thompson. *God's Holy Fire: The Nature and Function of Scripture* (ACU Press, 2002)

Leon Crouch. *An Introduction to Eschatology* (Star Bible).

Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke. *How to Think Theologically*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Augsburg Press, 2013).

A note on the textbooks: Many times these books may be available in a digital format for reading on an iPad, Kindle, or Nook (or any other reading device). While purchasing these books in this format is permissible for the purposes of this course, it should be noted that the instructor will present the assignments for reading based on the page numbers in the physical books. It will be the student's responsibility to find those areas in their reading devices.

**Teaching Methodologies**

To fulfill the teaching aspect of this course, the instructor will employ a number of methodologies in presenting the material for each week's module. This may include a short essay, an audio recording, or a video Power Point presentation on the particular topic as an introductory primer for the material contained in the readings. Instructions will be given at the beginning of each week, with related assignments and readings.

**Course Requirements**

**1. Weekly assigned readings and class discussion postings (50%).** This requirement is the heart of the course. At the beginning of every week, the instructor will post the assignments for the week, which will include the topic for discussion and the related readings, forum (chat) discussion link, pertinent documents for the week, questions to be answered and any additional bibliographic and resource materials.

The student will read the assigned texts and respond to the questions posted by the instructor. These responses will be posted in the discussion forum for that week for other students to see and perhaps to comment on. The responses to the questions should total no more than ¾ - 1 page (single spaced) for each week. The due date for turning in these postings to the instructor will be every Friday night of each week.

In addition to the student's own written response, the student will also be responsible to respond to at least one other class member's posted response in the discussion forum for each week. The response to a classmate's posting will be due by the end of Saturday night. A student may respond to any number of other students, but will be required to respond to at least one other student for the purpose of a grade.

Since this is an online course, interactions with the readings and answers to the discussion questions (postings) will be essential, which is why this portion of the assignments required is weighted so heavily. This requirement reflects the student's work throughout the course and therefore, carries the bulk of the grade for the course. The importance of this requirement cannot be over emphasized.

The instructor will usually open each week's assignments a few days in advance so as to allow for the work to be completed in a timely manner. However, subsequent week assignments are not in full view on the course page at all times. Each weekly module will be opened as the semester progresses.

Each of these weekly reading and response assignments will receive a weekly grade.

**2. Reflection Paper #1 (10%).** The student will write a **3-4 page** (double spaced) reflection paper on the book *How to Think Theologically* by Duke and Stone. This paper will be due at the end of the fourth week of the course (Sunday, October 4<sup>th</sup>). Technical guidelines for the writing of this paper will be given at a later time.

**3. Reflection Paper #2 (10%).** The student will write a **3-4 page** (double spaced) reflection paper on the book *God's Holy Fire: The Nature and Function of Scripture* by Cukrowski, Hamilton, and Thompson. This paper will be due at the end of the eighth week of class (Sunday, November 1). Technical guidelines for the writing of this paper will be given at a later date.

**4. Research Paper (30%).** The student will select a specific topic covered in class to investigate further and will write a **10-12 page** (double spaced) research paper that will be turned in towards the end of the semester (Thirteenth week). More instructions will be given at a later time for the technical aspects of writing of this paper and the exact due date.

### **Grading & Course Policies**

As mentioned above, the requirements in the course will be graded in the following manner:

1. Weekly readings, discussion postings (50%)
2. Reflection Paper 1 (10%)
3. Reflection Paper 2 (10%)
4. Research Paper (30%)

Scale:

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C= 70-79

D = Does not represent graduate work and is unacceptable.

Assignments not turned in by the required due date will be docked points in the final grade for that assignment. Any assignment not turned in by the end of the course will receive a grade of zero (0) for that particular assignment. No extensions will be given for work past the end of the semester.

### **Classroom Virtues**

Advanced theological studies invite students to participate in a process of theological and spiritual formation. Knowing how to think theologically comes by habit and by imitation, not simply by acquiring isolated facts. The assumption here is that books alone are insufficient for addressing difficulties of life and forming people into the image and likeness of God. Ultimately, we strive to form communities of inquiry, inviting you to inhabit a shared world of learning. Within such an environment, the goal is to cultivate critical skills of reflection, spiritual disciplines, interact authentically with one another, and learn to function as a community of inquiry. A large part of this involves connecting areas of life rather than pitting them against one another. Prayer, study, and other dimensions of life are all integral to the process of formation. Consequently, we invite you to participate in a set of practices; nurtured within this context, you pursue “intellectual, moral, spiritual excellence” the result of which is the formation of the whole person.

**I. Desire for truth in the context of love**—the aptitude to discern whether belief-forming processes, practices, and people yield true beliefs over false ones. People motivated by this desire will be more likely to conduct thorough inquiries, scrutinize evidence carefully, investigate numerous fields of study, consider alternative explanations, while respecting and caring for others.

**II. Humility**—the capacity to recognize reliable sources of informed judgment while recognizing the limits of our knowledge and the fallibility of our judgments. This is not created in isolation but takes into account feedback and correction from other sources of informed judgment.

**III. Honesty**—the capacity to tackle difficult questions without seeking simple answers. Ignoring complex and difficult questions only solidifies vices such as intellectual dishonesty, close-mindedness, and rash judgments. These vices preclude the possibility of refining our thinking and of participating in conversations with others.

**IV. Openness**—the desire to engage in an open-ended search for knowledge of God, including receptivity to different ideas, experiences, and people. Listening becomes a discipline that acknowledges the other and respects diversity. The art of being a student and a teacher is an ongoing process that necessitates hospitality, patience, and love.

**V. Courage**—the ability to articulate one’s position while considering other perspectives. The aptitude to express convictions involves risk yet fosters opportunities for meaningful dialog. Responding to objections entails tenacity but should not be confused with close-mindedness.

**VI. Wisdom**—the capacity to offer a synthetic discernment of knowledge on behalf of the community. The aim is not merely the dissemination of information but a pastoral implementation of faith for the building up of the community. It solidifies various pieces of data, practices, and experiences and aptly applies knowledge and faith to particular situations.

**VII. Stewardship**—the commitment to one’s accountability to the gifts and responsibilities that one brings to the classroom. Classroom engagement includes proactively participating in the course goals, seeking mastery of course competencies, and collaborating with faculty and fellow students in the developing of a learning environment. Committing oneself to spiritual and intellectual well-being and growth is a faithful response to the opportunities graduate education affords.

**VIII. Hopefulness**—the receptivity to the future possibilities of God. The cultivation of thankfulness for our heritages and expectation for our future ministries engenders a guard against cynicism and a spirit of perseverance during times of stress and disorientation.

**IX. Prayerfulness**—the making of space to commune with God. The task of learning and teaching so that we are formed into the image of Christ through the Spirit involves our consistent reliance on God’s sanctifying work.