

**THEO 500 INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY**  
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary  
Spring 2021

**INSTRUCTORS:**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the goals, tasks, and basic content of Christian theology as gift and task of the whole church in a world increasingly wracked by inequality, disease, racism, and fear. We examine key theological doctrines and convictions that are widely agreed to be essential to the Christian faith and explore implications for the identity and witness of the church today.

**OBJECTIVES:**

**Knowing:**

- Comprehend the scope and complexity of the theological task within contemporary Christianity as a global movement.
- Exhibit a basic grasp of the key doctrines and convictions of the Christian faith and their significance for Christian moral life in concrete contexts.
- Understand the variety of ways of doing theology (theological methods) today and their relation to specific theological commitments.

**Doing:**

- Acquire basic skills for critically analyzing, comparing, and integrating theological concepts in their relation to various contexts of contemporary Christian life.
- Gain a basic competence in constructing theological arguments in response to practical challenges.
- Develop foundational skills for demonstrating how to innovatively place different theological tradition(s) in conversation with one another.

**Being:**

- Become sufficiently self-aware to acknowledge one's own "operative theology"—those values, beliefs, convictions, and attitudes that implicitly and subconsciously shape our approach to the work of theology
- Cultivate habits of theological discernment rooted in openness, respect, and truthfulness.
- Embrace the work of theology as a multilayered, multifaceted, contested, ever-evolving conversation within a cloud of Christian witnesses, past and present.

## REQUIRED TEXTS:

Morse, Christopher. *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief. Second Edition.* T & T Clark, 2009. ISBN: 9780567027436. List price: \$47.95 (Amazon)

Schneider, Laurel C. and Stephen G. Ray, eds. *Awake to the Moment: An Introduction to Theology.* Westminster John Knox, 2016. ISBN: 978-0664261887. List price: \$35.00 (Amazon)

**Note:** *Additional readings to supplement the texts will be posted on Moodle.*

## GRADE STRUCTURE:

Why Am I a Christian?	20% (10% each)
Reflection Posts	20%
Essays	60% (20% each)

## ASSIGNMENTS:

### *Why Am I a Christian? Reflection*

**Aim:** The aim of this exercise is to help you bring to critical consciousness the convictions, virtues, and practices that shape your identity and witness, your “being” and “doing,” as a Christian. You will do the exercise both at the beginning and at the conclusion of the course to help you track and assess your theological and spiritual growth.

### **Task:**

Use the questions below to write an essay of 800-1,000 words in which you reflect on what it means for you to say “I am a Christian.”

- Why does it have this meaning for me?
- What beliefs, experiences, practices, and values shape this meaning for me?

**Note:** *This is not a research essay. Focus on your own experience and reflection to construct your response.*

### *Reflection Posts*

**Aim:** The intent of the exercise is to invite you into the work of theology, namely, to reflect critically on the meaning and significance of key Christian convictions for Christian witness today in conversation with your classmates.

**Note:** *These reflections are meant to be thoughtful theological engagements with the week’s topic, not off-the-cuff musings. So your posts (both your own reflections and your responses to your classmates’ posts) should reflect critical engagement with the week’s assigned readings and the lecture.*

**Task:** The task involves two parts: (1) a post of 350-400 words consisting of your reflection on the week’s topic; (2) a response of 150-200 words to *two* of your classmates’ posts.

### **Process:**

1. Having reviewed the lecture and the assigned readings for the week, post a reflection in the discussion forum on Moodle in which you assess theological implications of the topic we discussed for Christian witness in your context. Keep the following in mind as you

prepare: Each week will cover a lot of material and the idea is **not** that you try to comment on all of it. Rather, employing the skill of theological discernment, identify the aspect or aspects of the topic that raise the most important challenges for Christian identity and moral witness today and discuss why you think so.

2. Read and post a response to two of your classmates' reflections for the week. The intent of these responses is to foster the practice of critical theological exchange within a community of inquiry. **Note:** "*Critical*" does **not** mean being disrespectful, demeaning, or unkind but refers, rather, to our shared obligation to pursue the theological task in a spirit of mutual respect, openness, and honesty. With this in mind, in writing your response, focus on questions like these: Do you find the classmate's reflection about the topic on point, relevant, and persuasive? Why or why not? What challenges for further exploration or debate does the reflection raise? Be specific.

### **Essays**

#### **NOTE:**

1. You must complete **THREE** essays over the course of the semester, selected from the any of the thirteen weekly topics on the course schedule. **DO NOT SUBMIT MORE THAN THREE ESSAYS.**
2. Each essay is due on the date specified in the course schedule on Moodle. Late submissions risk penalties.
3. Each essay must contain the following identifying information: Student name, essay title, course number and title, and names of professors.

**Rationale:** The intent of the assignment is to invite you to critically analyze and answer the topic you selected.

**Task:** Write an essay of 5 ½-6 pages (2,500-2,600 words) in which you (a) articulate the insight, question, or challenge you wish to address in relation to the topic of the week you have selected, drawing on the required reading, lecture, and reflection posts; (b) explore, in light of (a), relevant and specific moral implications for truthful Christian practice today. The essay must be double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12pt type.

#### **Process:**

1. In no fewer than two pages, articulate and explain the question, insight, or challenge you will address, showing how it emerges from the week's assigned reading, lecture, and reflection posts and why it is a relevant or compelling question, insight, or challenge.
2. In the remaining pages, explore theological, moral, and practical implications for truthful Christian ministry today. Be specific.

#### **Students for Whom English Is a Second Language:**

Students for whom English is a second language often seek outside proofreading assistance. In such cases, you can make use of the following process in completing and submitting your written assignments.

1. Submit the complete but unproofread essay on Moodle by the assignment due date.
2. Inform the instructor that the essay is being proofread and when proofreading will be complete. (3) Email the proofread essay to the instructor, when received.

**Note:** (1) *The unproofread essay as submitted must be the COMPLETE essay. It may not be amended or edited for content.* (2) *The weekly reflection posts DO NOT fall under this language accommodation.*

**CLASS POLICIES:**

1. **Respect.** (a) Respect one another's perspectives, viewpoints, and differences. Speak the truth, but do so in love; so, critique viewpoints and perspectives, **not** persons. (b) Respect the classroom as an environment for learning. Therefore, participate fully, thoughtfully, respectfully, and in a timely fashion in all activities as assigned.
2. **Integrity.** Do not cheat. Own your own ideas and honor the ideas of others. Plagiarism is an extremely serious breach of integrity and is addressed forthrightly by the seminary. Review the seminary's policy on plagiarism carefully (*Student Life and Academic Handbook*, *G-ETS Bulletin*, etc.). It describes the various kinds of plagiarism and how to correct them. You are expected to familiarize yourself with this document. If you have any questions, please contact the instructor.

**DISABILITIES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:**

Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary is committed to providing equal access to its programs of graduate professional education for all qualified students with learning, physical, medical, or psychological disabilities. The seminary aims to provide reasonable accommodation for qualified individuals with a disability (based on clinical documentation) to ensure their access to and participation in seminary programs. For details, see "Disabilities Policies and Procedures" in the *2008-2009 Student Handbook*, p. 62. Please contact the Dean of Students for consultation.

## GRADING RATIONALE

Score Levels	Content	Conventions	Organization
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is well thought out and supports the thesis of the paper</li> <li>▪ Reflects application of creative and critical thinking</li> <li>▪ Has clear goal that is related to the topic</li> <li>▪ Is pulled from a variety of sources</li> <li>▪ Is accurate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No spelling, grammatical, or punctuation errors</li> <li>▪ High-level use of vocabulary and word choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information is clearly focused in an organized and thoughtful manner.</li> <li>▪ Information is constructed in a logical pattern to support the thesis statement.</li> </ul>
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is well thought out and supports the thesis</li> <li>▪ Has application of critical thinking that is apparent</li> <li>▪ Has clear goal that is related to the topic</li> <li>▪ Is pulled from several sources</li> <li>▪ Is accurate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Few (1 to 3) spelling, grammatical, or punctuation errors</li> <li>▪ Good use of vocabulary and word choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information follows discernable pattern of organization</li> <li>▪ Information supports the thesis statement of the paper.</li> </ul>
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supports the thesis</li> <li>▪ Has application of critical thinking that is apparent</li> <li>▪ Has indistinct goal</li> <li>▪ Is pulled from a limited number of sources</li> <li>▪ Has some factual errors or inconsistencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Minimal (3 to 5) spelling, grammatical, or punctuation errors</li> <li>▪ Low-level use of vocabulary and word choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Project has a focus but might stray from it at times.</li> <li>▪ Information appears to have a pattern, but the pattern is not consistently carried out in the paper.</li> <li>▪ Information loosely supports the thesis statement.</li> </ul>
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides inconsistent information for the thesis</li> <li>▪ Has no apparent application of critical thinking</li> <li>▪ Has no clear goal</li> <li>▪ Is pulled from few sources</li> <li>▪ Has significant factual errors, misconceptions, or misinterpretations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More than 5 spelling, grammatical, or punctuation errors</li> <li>▪ Poor use of vocabulary and word choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Content is unfocused and haphazard.</li> <li>▪ Information does not support the solution to the thesis statement.</li> <li>▪ Information has no apparent pattern.</li> </ul>