

**THE PROBLEM OF GOD**  
**Professor Lamm**  
**Spring 2009**  
Theo 001, Section 07

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**Course description**

Our course this semester approaches “the problem of God” from the angle of human experience and how many of our experiences, ordinary and extraordinary alike, give rise to theological questions—however we may answer those questions. We will read several “classic” texts together as well as some newer texts. The status of “classic” is assigned to “those texts, events, images, persons, rituals and symbols which are assumed to disclose permanent possibilities of mean and truth.”<sup>1</sup> All our texts explore a variety of human experiences and consider the role that religion plays in such experiences. Through readings and discussions, we shall reflect on and analyze such complex issues as freedom, evil, anxiety, meaning, the struggle of belief and unbelief, betrayal and trust, and human action.

This course is a designated ENGELHARD course that seeks to blend issues of health and well-being in with the academic content of the course. The Engelhard *Bringing Theory to Practice Project* is an initiative supported by the Charles Engelhard Foundation and developed in partnership with the American Association of Colleges and Universities. Georgetown's focus is on a pedagogy of “curriculum infusion” which blends college health issues into the curriculum content of academic courses through short, intensive modules that create meaningful connections between issues of student mental health and wellness and the course content. This semester, in our readings and class discussions we shall address issues such as anxiety, alienation, meaning & meaninglessness—and how we deal (or try not to deal) with these experiences; we shall also address experiences of joy, intimacy, courage, and trust. We shall have two guest speakers during the course of the semester. (For more information, see <http://explore.georgetown.edu/news/?ID=26589>)

**Course Requirements**

(1) Careful reading of the assigned texts, active class participation, and attendance. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to complete the assignment for the next class.

•You are expected to attend every class and to be on time. 4-6 absences will result in an automatic lowering of your final grade. More than 6 absences will result in automatic failure. Note that tardiness may be count as absence. (See the *Undergraduate Bulletin of Georgetown University* I.3.) If you must miss several days of class due to a more serious illness than the common cold or due to family emergency, you should contact your Dean. Be sure cell phones are turned off before class begins; an interruption to class due to your phone ringing will be counted as an absence.

(2) Two reflection papers (10% of final grade): the first due **Fri., January 30**, the second due **Fri., Apr. 17**.

(3) Two examinations during the semester (each 25% of final grade): **Mon., Feb. 9**, and **Fri., Mar. 20**

(4) A final examination (40% of final grade): **Saturday, May 9, 12:30-2:30 p.m.**

**Texts to purchase**

Augustine, *Confessions* (“Penguin Classics” edition, trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin. ISBN #014044114-x.)

Shusaku Endo, *Silence*, trans. William Johnston (Taplinger Publ. Co.)

Sigmund Freud, *The Future of An Illusion*, trans. J. Strachey (Norton & Co.)

John Haught, *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation* (Paulist Press)

Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear & Trembling* (“Penguin Classics” edition, trans. by Alastair Hannay)

Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Fortress Press)

Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Yale U. Press)

**Other texts, on reserve and/or available on Blackboard (“e” designates electronic reserve)**

†John Updike, “Varieties of Religious Experience,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (Nov. 20002)

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<sup>1</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (N.Y.:Crossroad, 1981), 68.

**Course outline and schedule:**

**I. Religious Experience and the Formulation of Theory**

**Week 1: Jan. 7-9**

Wed.: General Introduction

Fri.: Lecture: *Augustine's Journey to God—A Religious Autobiography*<sup>2</sup>

Reading: James J. O'Donnell, "It was on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, in the year 410..."  
<http://www.upenn.edu/almanac/v48/n34/Bac2K2-ODonnell.html>

**Week 2: Jan. 12-16**

Mon.: Reading: Augustine, *Confessions*, Book I

Wed.: Reading: *Confessions*, Books II-III

Fri.: Reading: *Confessions*, Books IV-V

**Week 3: Jan. 19-23**

Mon.: **Holiday: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**

Tues.: **Holiday: Presidential Inauguration**

Wed.: Reading: *Confessions*, Books VI-VII (chaps. 1-16)

Fri.: Reading: *Confessions*, Book VII (all)

**Week 4: Jan. 26-30**

Mon.: Reading: *Confessions*, Book VIII-IX

Wed.: Review of Augustine

Fri.: Lecture: *The Sociological Study of Religion and Religious Experience*

**First reflection paper due: religious autobiography**

**Week 5: Feb. 2-6**

Mon.: Lecture: *Introduction to Sigmund Freud's Psycho-analytic Theory of Religion*

Reading: Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, chaps. 1-2

Wed.: Reading: Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, chaps. 3-6

Fri.: Reading: *The Future of an Illusion*, chaps. 7-10

**Week 6 (a): Feb. 9**

Mon.: **First Examination**

**II. Problems of God-Talk in the Contemporary Context**

**Week 6 (b): Feb. 11-13**

Wed.: Reading: Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, chap. 1

Fri.: Reading: Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, chap. 3

**Week 7: Feb. 16-20**

Mon.: **Holiday: Presidents' Day**

Wed.: Reading: Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, Part II and Conclusion

Fri.: **First Engelhard Seminar**

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<sup>2</sup> For all reading assignments on Augustine, see "Study Guide to Augustine's *Confessions*."

**Week 8: Feb. 23-27**

Mon.: Reading: Haught, *Science and Religion*, Intro. & chap. 1

Wed.: Reading: Haught, *Science and Religion*, Creation, chaps. 3 & 5

Fri.: Reading: Haught, *Science and Religion*, Reductionism & Complexity, chaps. 4, 6, 7

**Week 9: Mar. 2-6**

Mon.: Lecture: *Introduction to Søren Kierkegaard*

Reading: *Genesis 22*

Wed.: Reading: Kierkegaard, *Fear & Trembling*, pp. 41-82 (Preface, “Attunement”, “Speech in Praise of Abraham”, and “Preamble from the Heart”)

Fri.: Reading: Kierkegaard, *Fear & Trembling*, Problema I: “Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical?”

~~~~~**SPRING BREAK**~~~~~

**Week 10: Mar. 16-20**

Mon.: Reading: Kierkegaard, *Fear & Trembling*, Problema II: “Is there an absolute duty to God?”

Wed.: Reading: Kierkegaard, *Fear & Trembling*, Problema III: “Was it ethically defensible ...?” and Review

Fri.: **Second Examination**

**III. The Problem of God in Times of Crisis**

**Week 11: Mar. 23-27**

Mon.: Lecture: *Introduction to Existentialism and Paul Tillich*<sup>3</sup>

Wed.: Reading, Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, chap. 2

Fri.: Reading, Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, chap. 3

**Week 12: Mar. 30-April 3**

Mon.: Reading, Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, chap. 4

Wed.: Reading, Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, chap. 5

Fri.: **Second Engelhard Seminar**

**Week 13: Apr. 6-10**

Mon.: Reading, Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, chap. 6 (first part)

Wed.: Reading: *The Courage to Be*, chap. 6 (second part)

~~~~~**Easter Break**~~~~~

**Week 14: Apr. 15-17**

Wed.: Tillich, Review

Reading: <sup>B</sup>Updike, “Varieties of Religious Experience”

Fri.: Tillich, Review

**Second reflection paper due: applying Tillich**

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<sup>3</sup> For all reading assignments for Tillich, consult “Study Guide to Tillich’s *The Courage to Be*.”

**Week 15: Apr. 20-24**

Mon.: Film: *Japan: Memoirs of a Secret Empire*, Episode 2  
see <http://www.pbs.org/empires/japan/theprogram.html>  
Wed.: Reading: Shusaku Endo, *Silence*, 3-100  
Fri.: Reading: Endo, *Silence*, 101-201

**Week 16: Apr. 27:** Discussion: Interpretations of *Silence*

**Final Examination: Saturday, May 9, 12:30-2:30**

(This Syllabus is subject to revision by Prof. Lamm)

Some notes on integrity and responsibility

**A Note on Academic Integrity:** It is expected that students are familiar with Georgetown's Honor System (see *Undergraduate Bulletin*) and that students abide by the Standard of Conduct outlined therein. Note especially the section on plagiarism, which I quote here:

Plagiarism, in any of its forms, and whether intentional or unintentional, violates standards of academic integrity. Plagiarism is the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another. While different academic disciplines have different modes for attributing credit, all value the contributions of individuals to the general corpus of knowledge and expertise. Students are responsible for educating themselves as to the proper mode of attributing credit in any course or field. Note that plagiarism can be said to have occurred without any affirmative showing that a student's use of another's work was intentional. (IV.3.b)

It is expected that you have already completed the online tutorial on scholarly research and academic integrity. Keep in mind the Honor Pledge:

“In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System:  
To be honest in any academic endeavor, and  
To conduct myself honorably,  
as a responsible member of the Georgetown community,  
as we live and work together.”

**A Note on Studying and Grading:** It is the University's expectation that you will devote at least 30 hours per week to studying, which translates into 6 hours a week for a 3-credit course such as this one. Each text should be read at least three times: once as preparation for class discussion; once as soon as possible after class discussion, while the ideas are still fresh in you mind; and again as review before an examination. I do not practice grade inflation. A = superior; B+ = very good; B = good; C = adequate; D = minimum passing; F = Failing

**Faculty Access/Student Access:** Students are responsible for checking the email account they have registered with the Registrar's Office; messages sent to students will be sent through GU's Faculty Access.

**Blackboard:** Students are responsible for accessing articles and assignments on Blackboard and/or reserve (regular and electronic) at Lauinger.

**No tape recording is allowed** without express written permission by professor.

**No laptops are allowed** with express written permission by professor.

**All electronic devices should be turned off.** Anyone text-messaging or using cell phones in class will be asked to leave and will be listed as absent.