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REL. 359: Issues in Christianity Today: The Question of Faith

Aim of the Course

The purpose of this course is to examine the meaning of religious faith within the context of the Western Christian tradition, with a particular focus on the modern period. Ultimately, the course intends to provoke you to reflect on your own faith (whatever that might be), by having you consider such questions as:

- *Why do you believe, or refuse to believe, in God?
- *In what, or in whom, do you put your entire trust?
- *What is the relation between faith and reason?
- *How do exemplary Christians model faith by their lives?
- *Does anything have the power to destroy faith? If so, can lost faith be restored?

The course will begin with an overview of the developments in nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy and theology that provide the immediate intellectual background for understanding the question of faith in contemporary Christianity. This overview will include introductions to the thought of Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, and Barth. The course will conclude with an in-depth study of the writings of three influential figures of the past several decades: H. Richard Niebuhr (on the structure of human faith), and Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dorothee Soelle (as two exemplars of Christian faith).

Prerequisite

Sophomore standing is prerequisite for this course.

Class Meeting Times

Class meetings will be held on Monday through Friday, from 12:15 to 3:00 P.M.

Course Requirements

1. *Class Participation (20% of final grade)*. Regular attendance at class meetings and regular participation in class discussions are expected. Additionally, each student will make one oral presentation. *More than one absence from class will progressively lower this portion of your grade.*
2. *Midterm Exam (25%)*, which will take place on the second Tuesday of the term. The exam will contain short answer and short essay questions.
3. *A 4-5 page essay (25%)*, due on the third Wednesday of the term. *Late essays will not be accepted without prior consent of the professor.*
4. *A 5-7 page essay (30%)*, due by 1:00 PM on the fourth Wednesday of the term.

Required Texts

1. F. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*.
2. S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*.
3. H. R. Niebuhr, *Faith on Earth: An Inquiry into the Structure of Human Faith*.
4. M. L. King, Jr., *Strength to Love*.

Note: There are also three items on reserve in Cole Library.

Students with Special Needs

Students who need accommodations for learning disabilities must provide documentation from a professional qualified to diagnose learning disabilities. For more information see cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml. Students requesting services may schedule a meeting with the [disabilities services coordinator](#) as early as possible to discuss their needs and develop an individualized accommodation plan. Ideally, this meeting would take place well before the start of classes. At the beginning of each course, the student must notify the instructor within the first three days of the term of any accommodations needed for the duration of the course.

Academic Honesty

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgment of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in The Catalogue, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

Course Calendar

Note: The reading assignments listed in this course calendar are to be completed PRIOR to that day's meeting of the class.

WEEK 1

Monday: Getting oriented

I. 19th and 20th Century Philosophical and Theological Background to the Question of Faith

Tuesday: (a) Kant on religion according to reason (Library reserve).

(b) Hegel on spirit, art, and religion (Library reserve).

(c) Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, First Speech.

Wednesday: Schleiermacher, Second Speech.

Thursday: (a) Schleiermacher, Third Speech.

(b) Barth on faith as trust, knowledge, and confession (Library reserve).

Friday: (a) Genesis 22 (Bible)

(b) Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 41-95.

WEEK 2

Monday: Kierkegaard, pp. 96-147.

Tuesday: MIDTERM EXAM.

II. The Structure of Human Faith

Wednesday: Niebuhr, *Faith on Earth*, chaps. 1-4.

Thursday: Niebuhr, chaps. 5-7.

III. Two Exemplars of Christian Faith

Friday: King, *Strength to Love*, chaps. 1-5.

WEEK 3

Monday: King, chaps. 6-10.

Tuesday: King, chaps. 11-15.

Wednesday: ESSAY DUE, AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS.
In-class viewing of the film, *Faith and Reason*.

Thursday: Soelle, *Against the Wind*, pp. xi-56.

Friday: Soelle, pp. 57-115.

WEEK 4

Monday: Soelle, pp. 116-168.

Tuesday: No class--work on final essay.

Wednesday: FINAL ESSAY DUE BY 1:00 P.M.

[Back to Courses](#)