

# THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER

## Course Syllabus

### Course Information

RELI 3330: Introduction to Christianity

Instructor: Gregory L. Bock, Ph.D.

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### Catalog Description

An introductory course that studies the origins, content, and meaning of Christianity by looking at the New Testament (both the Gospels and letters of Paul), the people and ideas that led to the major tenets of Christianity, and secondary texts to explain their meaning.

### Required Textbooks

[The Christian Theology Reader 5<sup>th</sup> Edition](#), by Alister E. McGrath

[The Story of Christianity](#), by David Bentley Hart

### Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to...

1. identify central teachings in the history of Christian theology through the creeds.
2. explain the so-called "good news" of the Christian message.
3. critically evaluate the arguments for the existence of God.
4. explore sources of theology, such as scripture, reason, tradition, and experience
5. identify and explain several attributes of God.
6. explain different models of the Trinity.
7. explain different theories of the atonement.
8. discuss Christian views of human nature.
9. explain and evaluate the doctrine of sin.
10. critically evaluate different theories of free will.

## Grading:

Initiator Posts (6 @ 100 points each)	500 points (lowest dropped)
Response Post Assignments (6 @ 10 pts each)	50 points (lowest dropped)
Quizzes (10 @ 10 pts each)	90 points (lowest dropped)
Essay (100 pts)	100 points
TOTAL	740 points

## Assessment:

**Discussion Board Assignment:** You'll make a minimum of six contributions to each discussion board: 1 initiator post + 5 response posts = 6 total posts (minimum). These posts will be spread out over three days, for example 1 initiator post on Friday night, 2 response posts on Saturday, and 3 response posts on Sunday. In other words, I want to see you active on the board at least three different days.

**INITIATOR POSTS:** You'll write one initiator post for each of the six modules. An initiator post is one that starts a thread based on the discussion prompt on the discussion board. A good post will offer a clear point of view and support it with material from the book. I'm looking for three direct quotes from the book.

If you only use course material to quote from, quotation marks and parenthetical citations are enough, for example: "yada, yada" (McGrath, 35). If students use even one outside source – like the excellent [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) – a reference list for *all* sources must be included at the end of the post and must follow Chicago Manual of Style (CMS). See [here](#) for CMS examples, and see how proper citations affect the grade in the rubric below. You do not have to use outside sources, but you do have to cite the textbook.

The post must be at least 500 words. There's no maximum word count, but keep in mind that grades are not based on quantity of words but on demonstrated comprehension and critical thinking. The grading rubric below shows exactly what is expected.

The due dates for initiator posts can be found on the discussion boards.

You must post first in order to view other posts. The edit function will be disabled. If you want to edit after posting, you may reply in the thread with corrections or request that I delete the post. There must be a very good reason for deletion. For grading purposes, I consider your first post to be the initiator post even if it is blank or incomplete.

Late initiator posts can be turned in for a lower grade before the board officially closes. A late penalty of half a letter grade per day applies in each case unless accompanied by a valid excuse (e.g. a doctor's note that indicates a serious illness). *Connectivity issues are not valid excuses for late work unless they are the university's fault.*

DISCUSSION BOARD RUBRIC (INITIATOR POSTS)	
0-25 points	Point of view is clear and well-supported.
0-25 points	At least three direct quotes with citations are included from the textbook.
0-25 points	It conveys respect for other points of view even if it takes a contrary position.
0-25 points	The grammar is polished, and citation style conforms to Chicago Manual of Style.

**RESPONSE POSTS:** In addition to the initiator post, you'll write at least five response posts for each module (for a total of 6 contributions: 1 initiator post + 5 response posts = 6). A response post is one that replies to a classmate's post and continues the conversation. One that ends the conversation or just says "I agree" in so many words does not qualify as a response. Good posts carry on the conversation in an interesting and relevant way and draw other students into the discussion. The minimum requirements for receiving credit for a response post are the following:

1. The post is 50 words.
2. The post is relevant to the thread.
3. The post ends with a question.

Posts under 50 words don't count toward the required number of response posts. If you happen to post a few that are under 50 words, just make sure to post a few extra posts that are 50 words.

If some of your posts don't end in a question, a deduction of **1 point** will be applied to the response post grade.

The penalty for not spacing out your posts over three days will be applied to the response post grade as a **3 point** deduction.

If you are very active on the discussion board and far exceed the minimum number of posts, you'll receive extra credit of 1 point each post up to five posts.

Response posts are due after you post your initiator post and before the board closes.

Late response posts will not be accepted. Once the board closes, there are no further opportunities to complete the assignment, so it's advisable to post early to avoid unforeseen events such as last-minute technical problems. Encountering technical issues is not a valid excuse for late work unless the issues are the university's fault.

The discussion board is the focus of this class, the main learning tool (notice the percentage of the grade). I will be active on the boards and hope to be involved in some rich conversations. Be sure to return regularly to the threads to reply to questions and comments, especially in your own thread. Learn how to search for posts, including mine, by using the search function on the

board. When I reply to a post, I often take a contrary position as devil’s advocate. My response to your posts should be interpreted as “constructive” and an opportunity to strengthen your argument. It doesn’t mean that I don’t like you or that I have a different religious viewpoint from you. In fact, it is nearly impossible to figure out my personal beliefs from my posts. If I express a point of view, I do so for teaching purposes, to help you think more carefully about your own position and to extend the conversation. By the way, it is possible to get an A and disagree with my religious beliefs. In fact, it happens quite regularly.

Cases of plagiarism earn an automatic zero and a possible F in the course. Plagiarized posts may be sent to UT Tyler Judicial Affairs to receive additional consequences. In short, do your own work, and be careful to give credit to the original author when you quote or paraphrase. You may use artificial intelligence (AI) to research your topic, but the post must be written by you and must incorporate passages from the textbook.

**Quizzes:** There are ten quizzes, and they correspond to chapters in the David Bentley Hart book (The Story of Christianity). These quizzes can be found under the Quizzes tab or in Modules. The quizzes are open book but timed. You must work alone and not receive help from the Internet or a friend or AI.

**Essay:** This assignment requires you to read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 through Matthew 7) and discuss the moral teachings of Jesus Christ. I’m looking for you to write an essay that explains what his teachings mean for his followers today. The Sermon covers a lot of ground, but I want an essay that’s focused on one topic or theme, not one that tries to summarize the whole sermon in a short essay. It’s your choice what you write about, but **you must get approval from me two weeks before the paper is due. I want you to email me with a paper title and short paragraph summarizing your paper.**

You are encouraged to use many tools as you prepare to write this paper, for example, the Internet, library, commentaries, and AI. However, you must write the paper yourself and cite your sources, using the [Chicago Manual of Style](#). You may use AI to help you brainstorm and research, but you may not use AI to write your paper for you. You are the author of this essay, which means it is your writing, containing ideas that you have formed on the basis of reading and interpreting the Bible yourself and researching what others have to say about it. I’m not grading you on how well you can manipulate a program (AI) to write an essay for you that satisfies the requirements.

This essay must be 2000 words (+ or – 100).

Failure to get approval from me on your topic two weeks in advance will result in a loss of 1.5 letter grades.

PAPER RUBRIC (100 POINTS)	
0-35 points	<b>Are the ideas in the paper/presentation well-supported or well-argued?</b> The paper makes its case, is well-organized, carefully researched, and contains clear reasoning or evidence.

0-35 points	<b>Are all sources cited?</b> Student makes multiple, relevant connections (with citations) to the Bible and at least three other sources. These sources are listed in a reference list at the end and are cited in the paper using footnotes.
0-15 points	<b>Was approval granted for this topic?</b> Student must receive approval two weeks in advance for their paper topic.
0-15 points	<b>Is the paper well-written?</b> Grammar is polished, and citation style conforms to <a href="#">Chicago Manual of Style</a> .

## Course Policies:

**Late work policy:** Assignments must be submitted by the deadline. A penalty of half a letter grade per day up to two letter grades will be assessed for late assignments. This penalty will be waived only under special circumstances (e.g. a serious illness accompanied by a doctor's note). Late discussion board posts are not permitted after the board closes.

**Communication policy:** The best way to communicate with the instructor is through UT Tyler e-mail ([gbock@uttyler.edu](mailto:gbock@uttyler.edu)) or in Canvas. Students can expect replies within 48 hours excluding weekends and holidays. Students who do not receive a reply within this timeframe should attempt to contact the instructor again. The instructor communicates with the class via Canvas emails and announcements. It is important that students check their email and allow push notifications for class announcements.

**Class conduct policy:** The subject matter of this class can make some people hot under the collar. This said, all comments and behavior must be classroom appropriate. What does "classroom appropriate" mean? It does *not* mean that students cannot express unpopular opinions. It means practicing reasoning and logical argumentation. It means being civil and listening with respect. Insults, snide comments, name-calling, cutting someone off, derogatory tones, sarcasm, ridicule, cussing, vulgarity, personal attacks, racial slurs, misogynistic remarks, etc. will not be allowed. If you are unsure about what counts as disrespectful, consult the instructor or the Golden Rule. The instructor will act as the final word on what is or is not classroom appropriate. Violators may be ejected from the class.

**Cell phone policy (face-to-face sections):** Mobile devices can be used in the classroom if it is related to what is going on in class. If you have an electronic textbook or plan to take notes on your device, please let me know early in the semester. They are permissible as long as they don't distract you or your classmates from the lesson.

**Arriving late or leaving early policy (face-to-face sections):** Arriving on time can sometimes be challenging, but it is better to be late than never. However, late arrivals and early departures can be disruptive. For this reason, please don't make a habit of it. If it becomes a regular issue, points will be deducted from the attendance grade.

**Extra credit policy:** Extra credit is available in the class but only on discussion boards and only when they're open. Each extra post (up to five max) will receive one point.

[“It is what it is” final grade policy](#): Grades are final once the final grade percentage has been calculated in Canvas at the end of the semester. No changes will be made unless the instructor has made a mistake. Grades are not bumped up unless the student is within .5% of the next letter grade. For example, an 89.5% is an A. An 89.4% is a B. No extra credit opportunities will be given during the last week of class. The conditions for an “incomplete” are stated in the university handbook: “(a) the student has been making satisfactory progress in the course; (b) the student is unable to complete all course work or final exam due to unusual circumstances that are beyond personal control and are acceptable to the instructor; and (c) the student presents these reasons prior to the time that the final grade roster is due.” The terms and deadline for satisfying an “incomplete” will be set by the instructor.

[Plagiarism policy](#): Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism is taking credit for material that is not your own whether it is copied from a classmate, textbook, or online source. Plagiarism is cheating, and cheating is the way of the Dark Side. If that isn’t enough of a deterrent in itself, plagiarizing will result in an F on the assignment and a possible F in the course. It could also mean suspension from the school. So, students should be sure to use proper citations and do their own work. If students are not sure whether something constitutes plagiarism, they should contact the instructor to ask about it before submitting the assignment. The penalty will apply whether the act of plagiarism is intentional or not.

[Artificial intelligence policy](#): AI is permitted only for specific assignments or situations, and appropriate acknowledgment is required. This course has specific assignments where artificial intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT or Copilot) are permitted and encouraged, such as the essay. When AI use is permissible, it will be clearly stated in the assignment directions and any restrictions will be explained. Use of AI must be appropriately acknowledged and cited, just as you would cite the use of any Internet source. If the use of AI is not mentioned in the assignment instructions, the default is that AI is not allowed during any stage of that assignment.

#### [UT TYLER HONOR CODE](#)

I embrace honor and integrity.

Therefore, I choose not to lie, cheat or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do.