

Christian Thought and Philosophy (ST5400)
Reformed Theological Seminary
Orlando, FL
Winter 2026

Instructor: Dr. Jonatan C. Simons
Email: jsimons@rts.edu
Schedule: January 5-9, 8 am-5 pm
Office Hours: After class; by email

Course Description

An introduction to Christian philosophy from a Reformed perspective. Topics include the relationship between philosophy and theology, major figures and movements in the history of Christian thought, and the application of philosophical thinking to Christian faith and practice.

This course is designed to give students a working knowledge of the major themes and issues of philosophy, as well as experience in analyzing and assessing the relation between these issues and the articulation of Christian thought.

A critical, historical survey of the development of the main schools of philosophy and the principal developments in Christian doctrine and thought after a brief introduction to philosophical thinking, the course concentrates on philosophical movements from early Greek philosophy to contemporary philosophy.

Course Objectives

1. Recognize the close relation between expressions of Christian thought and the philosophical world in which those expressions emerge.
2. Understand the major shifts in philosophical thought in the Christian West and the way these affect the articulation of Christian truth.
3. Appreciate the need to consider the thought world of one's own time in expressing Christian truth.
4. Re-consider the way Christian truth should be expressed and defended in light of both past and present philosophical mindsets.

Required Course Reading: PLEASE BRING PHYSICAL COPIES OF TO CLASS

Diogenes Allen and Eric Springsted, eds., *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (hereafter PRPUT).

Augustine, *Confessions* (trans. Henry Chadwick; Oxford World's Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). ISBN# 9780199537820.

PICK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- W. Andrew Hoffer, ed., *Revolutions in Worldview*
- Diogenes Allen and Eric Springsted, eds., *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* [Second Edition, 2007]

Recommended Reading

Merold Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism*

William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong*

Vern S. Poythress, *Logic : a God-centered approach to the foundation of western thought* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).

Course Topics

1. Why study philosophy?

2. History of Philosophy

- Pre-Socratics, Platonism, and Neo-Platonism
- Early Christian reception of philosophy
- Medieval and Reformation theological use of philosophy
- Early modern philosophical questions for theology
- Modern and postmodern philosophy and its influence on contemporary theology

3. Christian Thought and Philosophy

- Unbelief and Worldviews
- Arguments for God's Existence
- Religious Language
- Attributes of God
- God and Time
- Foreknowledge, Foreordination, and Freedom
- Evil
- Philosophical Anthropology
- Logic

Course Assignments

This class requires that the student work ahead. Before the week of the class, I *suggest* that the student have completed most of the assigned reading, and have a rough draft of each reading brief.

The reading briefs and the review essay are due the week of class, according to the due dates below.

The final research paper will be due one week after the end of class.

The student is required to complete the following three assignments in whole:

1. 10 Reading Briefs and classroom discussion

Students are expected to prepare a brief on the assigned reading. The purpose of the brief is to summarize the thesis, outline, and argument of the assigned readings, as well as to state one's own analysis of it (in the form of questions, confirmations, objections, etc.). However, the brief should not list a series of questions or objections, but rather, it should engage what the student views as the most pressing questions, and seek to answer them through the language and methodology of the text itself. Briefs should include quotations from various points in the readings (and page numbers or section numbers should be referenced).

Briefs should be 350 words.

Students are to upload their brief to CANVAS according to the due dates provided below and on CANVAS. Please bring your readings and briefs to class to aid in classroom discussion.

Each brief is 5% of the final grade.

2. Review essay on either *Revolutions in Worldview* or *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*

Write an essay that summarizes the text chosen, outlining its strengths (methodology, structure, and themes covered), but include one paragraph that describes its weaknesses. This essay should be at least 1,000 words, is 20% of the final grade, and is due on the first day of class: January 6 at 8:00 am.

3. Final Research Paper:

Students will write a research paper on a primary text from one of the reading briefs. The student will show competence in dealing fairly with that primary source and its argument. Evaluate the text, philosopher, and/or topics as it relates to Reformed theology. Use of secondary sources is encouraged. We will discuss the paper in class.

The paper should be 1500-2000 words. This paper will constitute 30% of the final grade for the course. Final papers are due 1 week after the last day of class: on January 16 at 5:00 p.m.

Please submit this final research paper on CANVAS

Grading Scale and Academic Standards

A (97-100), A- (94-96), B+ (91-93), B (88-90), B- (86-87), C+ (83-85), C (80-82), C- (78-79), D+ (75-77), D (72-74), D- (70-71), F (below 70)

Class attendance and participation are a central part of this course. Because this is an intensive course, missing a day is missing 20% of the class. If you miss a class, you are expected to contact another student regarding the information covered.

Late assignments will not be accepted.

Do not submit a paper that you submitted for another course. This will result in a grade of 0 for that assignment.

All written assignments should be submitted in Word format. Assignments should be double-spaced with 1" margins on all sides and formatted in Times New Roman 12 point type. Assignments must be submitted on CANVAS.

Academic Honesty (modified from Dr. Michael Allen, who adapted it from Dr. Timothy Phillips of Wheaton College)

1. The assignments are designed to extend and deepen your comprehension and appreciation of Christian theology and to increase your facility with theological method. The processes of defining a topic, researching the results of others' studies, critiquing those studies, and organizing your conclusions in a clear and cogent presentation provides valuable skills for your various leadership ministries. The use of sources is an essential step in appropriating the learning of the Church's tradition in its relationship to cultures to help us understand and faithfully practice Scripture.
2. Using information obtained from a source without indicating it (whether by footnote, parentheses, or bibliography or some other appropriate reference, depending on the type of assignment) is plagiarism (intellectual thievery and lying). This applies to **any** information that you gain from someone that is not "common knowledge." It does **not** apply **only** to exact quotations or precise verbal allusions. Altering the wording does **not** remove the obligation to acknowledge the source.
3. Cheating is the presentation of someone else's work, which the student ought to have done personally. This includes submitting answers to test questions derived by some means other than that intended by the instructor. It also includes turning in written assignments composed in whole or in part by someone else.
4. Cheating or plagiarism results, at minimum, in the disqualification of that unit of the course affected. A student caught plagiarizing or cheating will forfeit that project. A second offense will result in the forfeiture of the course. Punishments may be more severe than the minimum depending upon the specific situation.

Computer Policy (modified from Dr. Michael Allen, who modified it from Dr. Alan Jacobs of Baylor University)

Computers, tablets, and smart-phones are not allowed in class. Think I'm over-reacting? Think you're a master of multitasking? You are not. No, I really mean it. How many times do I have to tell you? Notes taken by hand are almost always more useful than typed notes, because more thoughtful selectivity goes into them; plus there are multiple cognitive benefits to writing by hand. And people who use laptops in class see their grades decline — and even contribute to lowering the grades of *other people*. Also, as often as possible you should annotate your books.

Reading Brief assignments (due dates will be posted on Canvas); I suggest that, prior to the week of class, each student read the assigned text and write an initial draft of each brief so that, on the week of class, they can edit each brief and submit.

SCHEDULE

Please read the following texts before each day of class and be prepared to discuss.

READ and BRIEF texts marked by a number (1., 2., etc.). They are also marked with *.

READ texts marked by a letter (A., B., etc.). We will discuss in class, but they do not require a brief.

DAY 1: Jan 5; pre-Socratics, Platonism, and Neo-Platonism

READ & BRIEF

1. *Plato: *Euthyphro* (PDF on CANVAS)*
2. *Aristotle: *Categories* 1-8 (text in PRPUT)*

READ

- A. Aristotle: (*Physics II.1-3*) (text in PRPUT)

DAY 2: Jan 6; Early Christian reception of philosophy

READ & BRIEF

3. Justin, 2nd *Apology* and *Dialogue with Trypho* 1-8 (PDF on CANVAS)*
4. Augustine: *Confessions* Ch 12 On Creation (PDF **NOT** on CANVAS)*

READ

- B. Athenagoras, *Apology* 3-17 (on CANVAS)
- C. Irenaeus *Against Heresies*. 2.13.3-5 and 2.33-34 (PDF on CANVAS)
- D. Origen, *On First Principles* 2.8 (PDF on CANVAS)

DAY 3: Jan 7; Medieval and Reformation reception of philosophy

READ & BRIEF

5. *Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* III (PDF on CANVAS)*
6. *Aquinas: *Summa* 1 q2 (text in PRPUT)*

READ

- E. Anselm, *Proslogium* 1-8 (text in PRPUT)
- F. Calvin, *Institutes* I.15 (PDF on CANVAS)

DAY 4: Jan 8; Early modern era philosophy reception of philosophy

READ & BRIEF

7. *Voltaire: *Candide* (PDF on CANVAS)*
8. *Hume, *On Miracles* (text in PRPUT)*

READ

- G. Descartes, *Meditations* I-III (text in PRPUT)
- H. Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling* (PDF on CANVAS)

DAY 5: Jan 9; Modern and postmodern reception of philosophy

READ & BRIEF

9. *Wittgenstein, *Lectures on Religious Belief* (text in PRPUT)*

READ

- I. van Til, *Credo* (PDF on CANVAS)

PRPUT refers to Allen & Springsted, eds., *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology*

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Christian Thought and Philosophy

Professor: Jonatan Simons

Campus: Orlando

Date: Winter 2025

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u>	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	Knowledge of Bible, systematic theology, historical theology, history, and cultural information will be presented and articulated in both written assignments and a dialogical teaching approach.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Strong	Student will demonstrate suitable use of Scripture and hermeneutical methods in understanding biblical worldview as it relates to other worldviews. Lectures will deal with the influence of biblical studies on Christian philosophical theology.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	Material will be presented through the grid of Reformed Theology and practice. The main course text evaluates the history of philosophy from a Reformed perspective.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Minimal	Materials will be presented that give the student a better understanding of the priority of sanctification
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Strong	This is the focus of the course. Students will gain an understanding of the need to conform all of life to the Word of God with special focus on "taking every thought captive."
Winsomely Reformed	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Strong	Student reads articles by authors that are not Reformed and discusses the value of ecumenicalism as it applies to philosophical theology. Some readings and lectures will focus on how the Christian faith challenges non-Christian worldviews but also what can be learned from them (common grace).
Preach	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Minimal	Content of course will influence the content of preaching.
Worship	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	None	
Shepherd	Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both in America and worldwide.	Minimal	The student will grow in their understanding of the role of reason for spiritual maturity. The course promotes the use of various gifts and encourages students to grow in their concern for non-Christians.
Church/World	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	The student will gain an understanding of how to interact denominationally, ecumenically, and in the local context.