

Christianity and Science: A Multidisciplinary Approach

Course Number: H&SS 66-301

Institution: Carnegie Mellon University

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Christianity and Science is a multidisciplinary lecture/discussion course that is part of the interdepartmental program in religious studies at Carnegie Mellon University. The nature and history of Christianity are considered in light of the cultural, political, philosophical and theological background of the patristic period (0-600 CE). The nature and history of science is developed using the classic “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions” by Kuhn. The history of the interaction of Christianity and Science is examined using the book, “God and Nature”, which is a collection of current scholarship in this area. Modern text exegesis is explored using the book, “In The Beginning” by Blocher. A current treatise on the topic of this course, “Quarks, Chaos and Christianity” by Polkinghorne is also studied in detail.

This is a lecture/discussion course. This means that student participation is essential for the success of the semester. Please plan to attend all sessions and contribute to the discussion. I will deliver some of the lectures, but there will be many guest lecturers from the CMU and Pitt communities.

There are five required books for the course:

Unity and Diversity in the New Testament (Dunn)

The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Kuhn)

God and Nature (Lindberg and Numbers)

In The Beginning (Blocher)

Quarks, Chaos and Christianity (Polkinghorne)

There is a required journal. It will contain comments on the lectures, comments on the books, comments on the discussions, and summary comments based on reflection.

There will be two required turns as a discussion leader. Pick the two discussion periods that most appeal to you. There will be several discussion leaders at each session.

There are three required formal papers.

66-301

Christianity and Science (2002)

Schedule of Lectures and Discussions

January

15 Introduction: Christianity and the Christ

17 Historical and Cultural Background

22 Discussion of "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament"

Chapters 1-3

24 Discussion of Chapters 6, 8, 9

29 Discussion of Chapters 11, 12

31 Discussion of Chapters 13, 14

February

5 Philosophy of Science - Kevin Kelly

7 Discussion of "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions", Chapters 1-3

12 Chapters 4-7

14 Chapters 8-10

19 Chapters 11-13

21 Background: Greek Science and Patristic Christianity

26 Early Christianity and Augustine - John Dolan

28 "God and Nature" Discussion of "Science and the Early Church"

March

5 Discussion of "The Copernicans and the Churches"

7 Mid-Semester Break

12 A Christian View of Science - David Laughlin

14 Discussion of “The Rise of Science and the Decline of Orthodox Christianity: A Study of Kepler, Descartes and Newton”

19 Christianity and Darwinism - Alan Love(Pitt)

21 Discussion of “The Impact of Darwinian Evolution on Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century”

March

26 Discussion of “Geologists and Interpreters of Genesis in the Nineteenth Century”

28 Discussion of “Protestant Theology and Natural Science in the Twentieth Century”

April

9 Discussion of “In the Beginning”, Chapter 1-2

11 Chapters 3-5

16 Chapters 6-8

23 Discussion of “Quarks, Chaos and Christianity”

Chapters 1-2

25 Chapters 3-4

30 Chapters 5-6

May

2 Chapters 7-8

Paper Topics (2002)

Topic I

The Christian community is observed to be composed of smaller worshipping communities, both historically and at present. Choose one of these subcommunities and discuss its formation, history, organization, beliefs and practice. (5-7 pages) Due February 14, 2002

Topic II

There have been many individuals who have been notable scientists and who viewed themselves as Christians. Choose one person and discuss their importance in the scientific community, their relationship to the Christian community and the interaction of their Christian faith with their scientific thoughts and practice. (5-7 pages) Due March 28, 2002

Topic III

There are many current issues that involve both a scientific perspective and which are debated in Christian subcommunities. Choose one issue and thoroughly explore both the scientific and religious aspects of the topic. You may take a position on the issue, but you do not need to. The requirement is that the issue be treated in a balanced way with a fully nuanced approach. (7-10 pages) Due May 10, 2002