



The University of Manchester



School of Arts, Languages & Cultures, Faculty of Humanities

COURSE UNIT DESCRIPTOR

GENERAL INFORMATION

Course Unit title	Contemporary Issues in Theology
Unit code	436
Credit rating	30
Level	7
Contact hours	40
Pre-requisite units	none
Co-requisite units	none
School responsible	Spurgeon's College with School of Arts, Languages and Cultures
Member of staff responsible	Dr. Joshua T. Searle
ECT	15
Notional hours of learning	300

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE UNIT

The unit focuses on three contemporary challenges to orthodox Christian belief – atheism, pluralism and changing notions of truth - seeking to deepen an understanding of their origins within a wider historical and cultural context. Particular attention focuses on the rise of the so-called 'new atheism' and the contrast with older forms of atheism. The social reality and theological challenge presented by religious pluralism is critically examined using a variety of theological resources. The related notion of truth, the rise of dogmatic pluralism and the associated breakdown in notions of authority are examined. Differing theological responses to these issues are examined through engagement with significant texts; the response of the local church to these challenges is addressed in a way that is theologically consistent with the Christian Faith and practically relevant.

AIMS

To engage theologically and critically with contemporary issues as they impinge on the life and mission of the local church, paying particular attention to atheism, religious pluralism and the nature of truth and authority.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Category of outcome	By the end of this unit students should be able to:
Knowledge and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">analyse critically the key ideas and underlying belief systems of differing forms of atheismengage critically with various forms of pluralism, particularly in the realm of religious belief and develop a Christian theological understanding of such beliefs
Intellectual skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">examine differing philosophical and theological understandings of the nature of truth and understand the impact of such beliefs in contemporary culture

Practical and transferable skills; personal qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • articulate a Christian response to atheism and pluralism within the context of Christian ministry • carry out independent research in the area of Christian theology • work autonomously
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ASSESSMENT

Assessment task	Length	Weighting within unit
Formative: • Seminar presentation	45 minutes	n/a
Summative: • An essay	6000-6500 words	100%

FURTHER INFORMATION

Semester	
Available on which programme(s)?	MTh (pathways ACS and BTS) and MA

Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Challenge of Atheism 2. Contemporary Christian Theological and Philosophical Responses to Atheism 3. Gnosticism in Church and Contemporary Culture 4. The Rise of Pluralism 5. Theological Responses to Pluralism 6. Theological Perspectives on Post-Truth 7. Justice and Peace: The Challenge of Liberation Theology 8. Nationalism and Racism 9. Contemporary Theological Perspectives on War and Peace 10. Contemporary Theological Perspectives on Sexuality 11. Discussion: Mission in Contemporary Society
Teaching method	Seminars
Additional eLearning content	Unit materials are available at Spurgeon's <i>Online</i> to support student learning
Feedback	Written feedback within 15 working days from submission
Date of approval (<i>for office use</i>)	
Information updated on	11 August 2017

INDICATIVE READING

- Brown, M., *Restoration of Reason: the eclipse and recovery of truth, goodness and beauty* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006)
- Carson, D.A., *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996)
- Cracknell, K., *In Good and Generous Faith: Christian Responses to Religious Pluralism* (London: Epworth, 2005)
- Dawkins, Richard, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006)
- D'Costa, Gavin (ed.), *Christian uniqueness reconsidered: the myth of a pluralistic theology of religions* (New York: Orbis, 1990)
- D'Costa, Gavin, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000)
- D'Costa, Gavin, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)
- Eagleton, T., *Reason, Faith and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (London: Yale University Press, 2009)
- Fergusson, D., *Faith and its Critics: a Conversation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Fletcher, J.H., *Monopoly on Salvation? A feminist approach to religious pluralism* (London: Continuum, 2005)
- Gunton, Colin, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- Hick, John, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (London: Macmillan, 1985)
- Hicks, P., *Evangelicals and truth: a creative proposal for a postmodern age* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998)
- Jüngel, Eberhard, *God as the Mystery of the World* (ET, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983)
- Marshall, B.D., *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- McGrath, Alister, *The Twilight of Atheism: the Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (London: Doubleday, 2004)
- Newbiggin, Lesslie, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London, SPCK, 1989)
- Nazir-Ali, Michael, *The unique and universal Christ: Jesus in a plural world* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008)
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991)
- Pinnock, Clark, *A Wideness in God's Mercy; the finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992)
- Sumner, G., *The First and the Last: the Claim of Jesus Christ and the Claims of Other Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004)
- Ward, Keith, *Why there almost certainly is a God* (Oxford: Lion, 2008)