



THEO 3900A: A Tour through Hell: Damnation in Christian Theology and Western Literature

“The path to paradise begins in hell.”
— Dante Alighieri

This course will survey the texts and thinkers associated with the Christian doctrine of hell in the Western imagination. It will begin with Dante’s *Inferno*, as the most popular text associated with hell, and then it will delve into the biblical imagery, moving on to map out the crux theological issues, exploring major issues and voices.

Dates: Monday, June 26 to Friday, June 30, 2017

Times: 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM (breaks and lunch times will be decided during the first class)

Location: Room T140, Thorneloe University (on the Laurentian Campus), Sudbury ON

Course Objectives

- To understand the biblical imagery behind common notions of hell
- To understand the theological issues surrounding the doctrine
- To better the student’s ability in analysis, critical reading and thinking, presentation, research, and essay writing
- To achieve personal betterment through engaging a difficult religious topic (regardless of whether the student is religious or not)

Note that this course does not intend to indoctrinate students in a particular theology of hell. While some views of hell will be more plausible than others, this course intends to present major interpretations for students to think about and will attempt to equip them to understand their position better. It follows the classic education philosophy that a good education does not tell people what to think but what to think about and how to think about things well.

Students similarly should adopt a perspective where they must recognize that not everyone in the class has similar experience or position, and rather than arguing in a dogmatic way or by mere offense, the student is encouraged to listen to other views, represent them fairly, and dialogue using reasoned arguments or questions.

Course Texts

Please visit our Official Textbook supplier, Crux Books, to order your textbooks: <http://www.cruxbooks.com>.

Holy Bible. This should preferably be a New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. John Ciardi. New York: New American Library, 2003. There are many translations of the Divine Comedy, but this is generally regarded as the most readable translation (cheaper or older translations are much more wooden and awkward) and it includes study notes.

Sprinkle, Preston. Ed. *Four Views on Hell*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.

Walls, Jerry L. *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015.

Attendance Policy

Because this is an intensive course, attendance each day of the week is mandatory.

Academic Integrity Policy

The University treats offences of academic dishonesty (i.e. plagiarism, cheating, and impersonation) as very serious matters. Penalties for such offences are strictly enforced and may include a failing grade on an assignment, failure of a course, and/or expulsion from the University.

Scholarships and Bursaries

Every year, Thorneloe University offers a number of Scholarships and Bursaries to students registered in Thorneloe Programs and Courses.

Scholarship Applications are available in September and are presented at Thorneloe University's annual Fall Convocation.

Bursary Applications are available in January, May, and October.

Application Forms are available in the Main Office, and at <http://thorneloe.ca/theology> (see *Forms and Fees*).

Assignments (With Grade Percentage)

1. In Class Reading Notes for Discussion (5% x 4 = 20%)

There will be periods in the day to discuss the readings from Walls. Two chapters will be assigned for reading every night. You are responsible for reading these chapters and writing reading notes.

What are reading notes? There is a lot of leeway here. The notes can summarize the text, but the point of these notes is to have questions or critical impressions for discussion. They can be a series of clarification questions about the text: "The author says this on page 10; what does he mean by this?" The notes can state thoughtful disagreement or reflect and apply a statement that resonated with them. Be sure to indicate the page of the text in brackets like this: (pg. 1).

Assignments will be submitted in class after the discussion. Written lecture notes should be approximately **250 words per chapter**. The reading notes can be single spaced.

Monday Night:

Read Walls, Chapters 1-2

Tuesday Night:

Read Walls, Chapters 3 & 8

Wednesday Night:

Read Walls, Chapters 4-5

Thursday Night:

Read Walls, Chapters 6-7 (remember also to prepare a tentative thesis for discussion for Assignment 3)

These reading notes will be marked as "Pass/Fail." They are intended to show the professor that you have thoughtfully read the chapters and are prepared to contribute to discussion in class.

2. Book Review on Theological Views of Hell (40%)

Completed within a month after the modular course, you will submit a book review of *Four Views on Hell*, 2nd ed. This review should be about **10 pages double-spaced**. The review should use about 50% of the space to summarize the four positions and the other 50% to offer critical reflection with a beginning and concluding paragraph of remarks.

In addition to proper citation, grammar, form, etc., reviews will be marked for demonstrating good knowledge of the reading, accurate summary and representation of the views, as well as clear and thoughtful critical engagement with the perspectives.

Submit by email to theology@thorneloe.ca.

Due July 17th unless an extension has been requested and granted by the Instructor

3. Essay (40%)

The final assignment, to be completed within two months of the modular course, is an essay interpreting the idea of hell in either a biblical text, a theological issue, a historical personality, or literary text. This assignment gives the student full liberty to explore a notion of hell that interests them.

Make sure that the thesis is clear and focused, usually placed at the end of the introductory paragraph. A thesis should (1) introduce the topic, (2) offer the student's slant or point, and (3) the major argument or evidence for that point. Here is an example of a proper thesis: "In Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*, the logic of his argument suggests universalism, primarily seen in how he understands the person, character, and work of Christ." From here, the person, character, and work, would form the topics of the major supporting paragraphs of the essay.

Depending on the topic chosen, the student should be careful not to get bogged down. If it is a theological issue, be sure to cut it down to something manageable. For example, arguing, "Hell cannot be eternal," would be vague and too all-encompassing. Arguing instead, "If hell is an 'eternal punishment,' the Greek and Hebrew terms for 'eternal,' *olam* and *aionios* do not seem to mean unending duration," this would be a pointed thesis that can be argued by charting usages of these terms in the biblical text.

The topic does not need to be directly related to hell, but it does need to be applicable. For instance, “Christ’s work on the cross seems to be total, fully atoning for all sin, and thus, this arguably implies that none should be lost. ”

If a text of the Bible is chosen, the most prudent way to treat it is by looking up several academic commentaries, summarizing the various views of that passage with regards to each position, and then offering what the student thinks is the most probable interpretation. For instance, a thesis might look like this: “While the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 can be interpreted differently by annihilations, infernalists, and universalists, the infernalist interpretation is the most likely due to the symmetry of eternal punishment/reward.”

If you choose a theological issue, you ought to be careful to delimit your essay to a workable thesis. For instance, arguing the thesis, “Universalism is the most probable interpretation of the content of the Christian Bible,” would be impossible in the space allotted. However, this thesis would work: “The work of Christ on the cross is essential to the discussion on the scope of salvation, and it can be argued that if the work of the cross is universal in Scripture (destroying and forgiving all sin), its effects should be equally as universal (saving all sinners).”

If you work on a historical theologian’s work, it is recommended that you interact only with one of their major works. For instance, arguing, “Augustine’s theology displays a problematic theology of double predestination” would require treating way too many books. Meanwhile, arguing, “Augustine, in his *City of God*, displays a problematic notion of double predestination, because it contradicts his theology of the loving character of God,” would reduce the range of research for the student immensely.

Here are some suggestions:

- Apocalypse of Peter
- Gospel of Nicodemus
- Origen, *On First Principles*
- Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*
- Gregory of Nyssa, *The Soul and Resurrection*
- Augustine, *City of God*
- Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*
- John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*
- Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God*
- Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved?*
- Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*

- C. S. Lewis, *Problem of Pain*
- Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*
- Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist*
- Bradley Jersak, *Her Gates Will Never Be Shut*

Also, if you choose a literary text, you must not merely summarize the text, but must also argue an interpretation that is not self-evident in the text. Saying, for instance, “I will explore the notion of punishment in Dante’s *Inferno*” is way too broad. However, saying, “In Dante’s *Inferno*, Dante’s notion of punishment of contemporary individuals (such as certain Popes, etc.) suggests that he intended his poetry to motivate political reformation in this life and not merely display retributive judgment in the next life,” would be an interpretation of the poem that the student could argue. All this advice means that you should be *specific* in your arguments, properly delimiting your topic. If you are unsure, do not hesitate to email the professor. Other literary works on hell could be...

- William Blake, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
- John Milton, *Paradise Lost*
- C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*

The paper should be no longer than **10 pages double-spaced (approx. 2500 words)**. All citations should be in **Turabian style**. The student should be thinking about what topic they would like to handle and **have a possible topic and tentative thesis for the final class**, so that the other students and instructor can advise the topic.

You can find a good quick guide to Turabian style at http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html.

Essays will be graded on correct grammar and citation, well-delineated thesis, clear structure and argumentation, depth of research and level of analysis.

Submit by email to theology@thorneloe.ca.

Due August 14th unless an extension has been requested and granted by the Instructor.

Appendix: Grading at Thorneloe University

Percentile Numerical	Letter Grade	Definition	Description
90%-100%	A+	Exceptional	Exceptional analysis: thoughtful integration; creative synthesis; relevance and application across contexts; depth of insight; clarity, flow and connectedness throughout; careful attention to stylistic and formal details; coherence and unity are strong.
85%-89%	A	Outstanding	Superior Performance: comprehensive, in-depth understanding of subject matter; demonstrates initiative and fluency of expression; work is of outstanding quality that provides clear evidence of understanding of the subject matter.
80%-84%	A-	Excellent	Excellent: accurate work in which evidence of comprehension of the subject is clearly evident; well-developed integration and synthesis of ideas; evidence of ability to apply concepts beyond a single context; insight evident; clarity, flow and connectedness present; stylistic and format details present, but less refined; coherence and unity evident.
75%-79%	B+	Very Good	Very Good: clearly above average performance with knowledge of principles and facts generally complete and with no serious deficiencies.
70%-74%	B	Good	Good: solid knowledge of content; shows integration and synthesis of theory and opinion; less refined application beyond single context; shows clarity of thought and logical organization of ideas; maintains focus; less refined stylistic and format details; gaps in coherence and unity.
66%-69%	C+	Satisfactory	Satisfactory: basic understanding with knowledge of principles and facts at least adequate to communicate intelligently in the discipline.

60%-65%	C	Adequate	Adequate: work of adequate quality which suffers from incompleteness or inaccuracy; incomplete understanding/knowledge of content; inconsistencies in integration and synthesis; unrefined, vague, or absent application of concepts; rambling but leading to a point; inconsistent focus, sequencing, and/or connections; lack of attention to style and format; large gaps in coherence and unity.
55%-59%	D+	Passable	Passable: some understanding of principles and facts but with definite deficiencies; work where the minimum requirements of a course are barely satisfied.
50%-54%	D	Marginal	Minimal Pass: a passing grade indicating marginal performance; student not likely to succeed in subsequent courses in the subject.
40%-49%	E	Failure	Unsatisfactory fail: knowledge of principles and facts is fragmentary; student has failed to complete substantive course requirements.
0%-39%	F	Failure	Failure: minimum requirements have not been met and no credit is given for the course; knowledge of principles and facts is fragmentary; or student has failed to complete substantive course requirements. Lack of understanding/ knowledge of content; unclear, rambling, does not make a point; lack of integration and/or synthesis; lack of focus and/or concept development; little or no attention to style and format; lacking in coherence and unity.