

Conrad Grebel University College
University of Waterloo

RS 258: God

Winter 2020

Class Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30 – 12:50

Location: CGUC 1300

Instructor: Assistant Professor Carol Penner

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 10:00 – 11:30

Office Location: Room 2112

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Course Description:

(from calendar) “An examination of ideas about God in Western thought from religious, philosophical, cultural, scientific, and political perspectives.”

This course explores the development of monotheistic religions, from the early origins of religious ritual, to the major religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. What methods do we use in exploring the concept of God? How has belief in God shaped Western society? How is belief in God expressed today?

Learning Goals:

1. Students will be able to describe the roots of religious ritual and thought.
2. Students will be able to identify a variety of ways of thinking about God.
3. Students will be able to identify how belief in God has political, social, scientific and cultural implications.
4. Students will develop communication skills as they discuss their own religious contexts (belief or non-belief in God) and commitments.
5. Written assignments will foster critical thinking and communication skills.

Required Reading Materials:

Texts:

Aslan, Reza. *God: A Human History*. New York: Random House, 2017

Bowker, John. *God: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Evaluations:

All assignments will be handed in through LEARN.

Assignment	Weighting	Due Date
Journal	10%	January 21
In-Class Reading Quizzes	10%	Random 10X
Mid-Term Test	20%	February 13
Critical Book Review	30%	March 26
Take-home Exam	30%	April 9

Assignments:

#1. Journal: What I believe or don't believe about God (10%)

Goal: To articulate our own beliefs or thoughts about God.

Due Date: January 21, 2020

Length: 1000 words

Format: The journal will have a title page with your name, student number, date, and a title "Journal: What I believe or don't believe about God," along with a word count.

The journal will be doublespaced.

While the journal is your own personal thoughts, it should be well organized, and not simply stream of consciousness. You will need to write a draft, and then organize your thoughts.

Describe your belief in God, or why you don't believe in God. How do you describe God? What influenced your decision to believe or not believe? How has organized religion, your family and your culture shaped your ideas about God? If you have been involved in a religious community, how has it shaped your ideas about God? Have you had what you would call a personal encounter with God? This journal is a chance for you to share some stories that have been important about this topic.

#2. In-Class Reading Quizzes (10%)

Goal: To demonstrate that you are attending class and have done the readings. Class readings are the foundation of our class discussions.

These quizzes will each have two questions that anyone who has done the reading will easily answer. They are not trick questions or designed to be difficult, they simply show that you have done the reading.

These will take place ten times randomly throughout the semester. You will need a laptop to complete the quiz.

#3. Mid-term Test (20%)

Goal: To demonstrate that you have grasped the course content.

Date: February 13, 2020

Format: The test will have ten multiple choice questions, and one essay question.

On February 6 you will be given three essay questions. Two of these will be on the test, and you can choose which one you want to answer.

#4. Critical Book Review (30%)

Goal: The purpose of this book review is to demonstrate your ability to summarize a book, and to show your critical skills in examining an expressed belief in God.

Due Date: March 26, 2020

Length: 1500 words

Choose one of these books:

Arthur, Sarah and Erin F. Wasinger. *The Year of Small Things*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2017.
Bowler, Kate. *Everything Happens for a Reason* New York: Random House, 2018.

Format:

The book review will have a title page with your name, student number, date, and a title "Critical Book Review of *Book Title*", along with a word count.

The review will be doublespaced.

It will have an introductory paragraph where you explain what the review is about, and your thesis about the book, as well as a concluding paragraph where you summarize what you have done.

The body of the review will have three parts

- A. (750 words) Summarize the book for someone who hasn't read it
--the summary will include comments about content, organization and style
- B. (500 words) What does the author believe about God?
--what shaped these beliefs: tradition, institutions, encounters with God?
--how does their faith in God shape their actions?
- C. (250 words) What do you think about the book and its ideas?
--would you recommend it? Why or why not?
--was it well-organized and easy to read, or was it difficult to understand?
--did you find the arguments compelling?
--did it challenge or inform your own views about God?

#5. Take-Home Exam (30%)

Distributed: April 2

Due: April 9

Format: There will be three questions, you will choose two. This is not a research paper, you should be able to answer the questions with reference to your notes from class and the assigned readings. You do not need formal footnotes, but if you use a direct quote, cite the author and page number.

Course Schedule:

Class	Topic	Reading
Jan 7	Why study God?	
Jan 9	Thinking about God	Bowker, Preface, pp. xiii-xviii. Aslan, Introduction, pp. xi-xvi.
Jan 14	Does God exist?	Bowker, Chapter 1, p. 1-10.
Jan 16	Speaking of God	Bowker, Chapter 1, pp. 10-20.
Jan 21	Arguments for God	Bowker, Chapter 1, pp. 20-27.
Jan 23	Why believe in God?	Bowker, Chapter 2, pp. 28-39.
Jan 28	First Thoughts about God	Aslan, Chapter 1, pp. 1-18.
Jan 30	Primal Belief in God	Aslan, Chapter 2, pp. 19-35.
Feb 4	Images of God	Aslan, Chapter 3, pp. 37-47.
Feb 6	God in Our Image	Aslan, Chapter 4, pp. 51-66.
Feb 11	God, Religion and Civilization	Aslan, Chapter 5, pp. 67-87.
Feb 13	Mid-term Test	Review previous readings
READING	WEEK	
Feb 25	God Over All	Aslan, Chapter 6, pp. 89-107.
Feb 27	Jewish Understandings of God	Bowker, Chapter 3, pp. 40-49.
Mar 3	God is One	Aslan, Chapter 7, pp. 111-128.
Mar 6	God and Suffering	Bowker, Chapter 3, pp. 49-54 & Handout.
Mar 10	Christian Understandings of God	Bowker, Chapter 4, pp. 55-71.
Mar 12	God is Three	Aslan, Chapter 8, pp. 129-135.
Mar 17	Spreading Ideas about God	Aslan, Chapter 8, pp. 135-146.
Mar 19	Muslim Understandings of God	Bowker, Chapter 5, pp. 72-83.
Mar 24	God is All	Aslan, Chapter 9, pp. 147-164.
Mar 26	Knowing and Not-Knowing God	Bowker, Chapter 7, pp. 104-115.
Mar 31	Virtual class (no in-class presence required)	Assigned video
Apr 2	Epiphanies	Aslan, Conclusion, pp. 165-171.

UWaterloo Policies

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Arts: [Academic Integrity website](#) University of Waterloo: [Academic Integrity Office](#)

Notes

Class Attendance

Being present and participating in class discussion and activities is essential for the pedagogical method of this course. Students are expected to come to class having read the required readings for the day, with readiness to discuss them. If you are unable to make the class, please let the instructor know by email if you will be absent. If you miss three classes, even for unavoidable reasons, an alternative assignment may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor to make up for the missed class time.

Citations and Plagiarism

Your sources must be fully documented, according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). The latest edition is available [on-line](#). Please use the notes and bibliography system rather than the parenthetical author/date system. Using undocumented quotations from published sources, or submitting work that is not your own will have serious ramifications for your academic career.

Tardy Assignments

Punctual submission of assignments is expected. Late assignments will be accepted only if you have talked to the instructor ahead of time for an extension. A 5% deduction will be levied for every day an assignment is overdue.

Confidentiality

In the course of our discussions as we explore pastoral caregiving, the students or instructor may wish to share stories of a personal nature. It is expected that personal stories you hear in class will not be repeated outside the classroom without the express permission of the person who told the story.

Self-Care

Pastoral care involves interacting with people in the stressful and disturbing times of their lives. We will be discussing these various contexts for pastoral care, and at times role playing. Depending on your history, this may cause emotional stress or emotional discomfort. For self-care purposes you may excuse yourself from a discussion.

The Land on Which We Meet:

We acknowledge that we are located on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe, and the Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo and Conrad Grebel University are situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometers (six miles) on each side of the Grand River.

Other sources of information for students:

Mental Health Services aim is to provide holistic programming and services to help you lead a healthy and balanced life. We strive to provide a secure, supportive environment for students of all orientations and backgrounds. Students suffering from problems with anxiety, depression, problems with sleep, attention, obsession or compulsions, relationship difficulties, severe winter blues, etc., may make an appointment by phone or in person. Appointments are usually available within two days of initial contact with one of our medical doctors. All contacts are completely confidential. Phone 519-888-4567 ext. 32655.

For students with learning differences: The [AccessAbility Services \(AAS\)](#) office, located in Needles Hall Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the ASS office at the beginning of each academic term.

Counselling Services: Counselling Services provides free confidential counselling, in both individual and group sessions, with qualified professionals to help registered students, faculty and staff with personal concerns, educational career decisions, and strategies to studies and exams: www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infocs, ext. 33528, NH Room 2080.

The Writing Centre: Writing Centre staff offer one-on-one support in planning assignments and presentations, using and documenting research, organizing and structuring papers, and revising for clarity and coherence. Make an appointment or drop in at the Library for quick questions or feedback. To book a 50-minute appointment and to see drop-in hours, visit www.uwaterloo.ca/writing-centre