



FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

## THE PROBLEM OF GOD

### COURSE MOTIVATION

The introduction of a course in The Problem of God is framed in a context governed by the following findings and principles:

1. The Comillas Pontifical University is a Catholic University that offers a Christian response to the fundamental questions of human life. However, its belief in and respect for religious freedom shapes this proposal without ever imposing interpretation or meaning. At the same time, by adopting this approach, it aims to have a positive impact on university life.

2. The purpose of a Catholic university is “to ensure a Christian presence in the university world to confront the great problems of society and culture”. To do this, it is essential to safeguard, at all times, “the legitimate autonomy of human culture and especially of the sciences” and “to commit, more specifically, to the dialogue between faith and reason”. Serving this purpose, “the education of students must integrate academic and professional development with training in moral and religious principles” (Const. Apost. "Ex corde Ecclesiae", 15.08.1990).

3. The envisioned purpose of this course is to provide students of the University with basic principles in the field of religion. In doing so, we start by exploring the significance that religion has had in the past and that it continues to have in our culture and society, the importance that it is destined to acquire in directing their lives and the desire to equip students with a toolbox of knowledge and ideas that enables them to build their own response to doctrines, events and opinions that constitute an expression of the religious world or tend toward the denial thereof.

## PREMISES OF THE METHODOLOGY OF THE COURSE

1. The idea behind the program is the belief that the Christian faith, on the one hand, owes everything to religious doctrine, and yet, on the other, is also breaking away from it. There is a religious basis for the experience of faith, but this, from the experience of Jesus, substantially modifies the general religious experience.

2. Consistent with that expressed in the “Course Motivation” section, this course does not aim to discuss religion from a supposedly neutral stance. Instead, by taking an honest and sincere approach, we aim to explain the founding premises of the Christian faith from which to approach the idea of religious doctrine.

3. In our society, it is very common to take a syncretistic approach, in which talking about religion consists in homogenizing religious traditions and stripping away their individual characteristics. The underlying focus behind this module is the belief in the intrinsic value of each religion and its possibilities for salvation. In this case, the syllabus specifically discusses Christianity, highlighting the diverse means of expressing religiosity in light of the fact that they all share a genuine search for transcendence and testify to this search.

4. The reference to Christian doctrine leads us necessarily to pinpoint the focus of this experience: Jesus of Nazareth, not as an added point to the general idea of God in religion, but rather as the true revelation of the face of God, the Father of all humans.

5. The phenomenon of religion runs full spectrum from myth to history. If Christian tradition has incorporated elements of mythology, it has done so in a kerygmatic interpretation of such myths. The prophecy, testimony and the interpretation of historical events take place within the context of the credible announcement of the Good News of Jesus.

6. This subject is taught with two important issues in mind. Firstly, for some students at the University, this will be the only time during their studies that they have access to this type of knowledge and reflections on religion. And secondly, the way the contents are presented, the focus and tone of the course must display the utmost respect for the opinions, beliefs and feeling of students belonging to other religions or those that are members of no religion.

## CORE TOPICS

### Topic One: unity and plurality of religious doctrine

This topic aims to provide a presentation of some of the main features of religious doctrine as a means of recognizing that which is sacred expressed in myths, sacred texts and ritual celebrations. The religious experience has certain shared characteristics, diversified in different cultures to such an extent as to lead to the creation of the major world religions. They all share an assumption of the truth, a mystic view of transcendence and a desire to configure human existence by bestowing meaning upon it

### Topic Two: history and salvation in Christian religious doctrine

The second topic places Christianity within the context of religion in general. Its salvational nature transcends mythological approaches to create kerygmatic and prophetic ones. Christian religious doctrine is a history of salvation that has characterized a community of people and placed it within a process of accomplishment throughout history. Scripture bears witness to this experience of God teaching his people. Throughout this history, the wait for the Messiah expands to universal perspectives that create the foundations for a shared hope for humanity.

### Topic Three: the specific nature of the Christian revelation

The third topic presents the specific nature of the Christian revelation. Jesus Christ as the manifestation of God that breaks away from the particularism of religions to fulfill human efforts in the search for God. The realization of the historical and eschatological presence of the God of Jesus is the Kingdom, the Good News unfolds as something new, a break from previous expectations. But his proclamation in the Church must include the demands of a wealth of cultural and social contexts. Christian hope blooms as a transformational factor in the world as a result of the experience of faith.

<b>Module details</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>The Problem of God</b>
<b>Code</b>	
<b>Degree</b>	<b>Bachelor's Degree in Humanities and Social Sciences</b>
<b>Year</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Term</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ECTS credits</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Type</b>	<b>Optional</b>
<b>Department</b>	<b>Fundamental Theology</b>
<b>Area</b>	
<b>Coordinator</b>	<b>José Ignacio Vitón de Antonio</b>

<b>Academic staff details</b>	
<b>Lecturer</b>	
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## **SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE MODULE**

<b>Contextualization of the module</b>
<b>Contribution to the professional profile of the degree</b>
<p>General personal development</p> <p>The course takes a critical look at religious dimensions and different social realities. It fosters students' ability to analyze different social and religious realities. It promotes coexistence between people of different religions and social and cultural traditions. It strengthens our capacity for dialogue and our knowledge of the different religious traditions of the world today.</p>
<b>Prerequisites</b>
<p><b>There are no prerequisites.</b></p>

## **BLOCKS AND CONTENT**

<b>Blocks</b>
<b>BLOCK 1: Unity and Plurality of Religious Doctrine. Christian Doctrine</b>
<b>Topic 1: Foundations of Religious Doctrine</b>

### **1.1 - Approaches to the study of Religion**

The positive study of religious doctrine: religious sciences and phenomenology of religion.  
The structure of religious doctrine according to the phenomenology of religion.

### **1.2 – Religious Doctrine and its current context**

The secularization of modern society: theory and criticism  
The 're-enchantment of the world': new forms of religion  
Religious fundamentalism and the cult phenomenon

## **Topic 2: Plurality of Religion**

### **2.1 - The diversity of religions. General typology. Ancient religious mentality. Primitive religiosity**

#### **2.2 - Buddhism**

**2.2.1 Siddhartha Gautama: The Buddha**

**2.2.2 Four Noble Truths. Enlightenment**

**2.2.3 Features of Buddhism: lifestyle, meditation, different types of Buddhism**

#### **2.3 - Islam**

**2.3.1 Muhammad**

**2.3.2 Koranic religion**

**2.3.4 Society and anthropology**

#### **2.4 - Hinduism**

**2.4.1 Historical Evolution: from Pre-Vedic and Vedic India to contemporary Hinduism**

**2.4.2 Hindu Worldview: the notion of Karma, structuring of society, the problem of evil**

#### **2.5 - Judaism**

**2.5.1 Most important historical moments**

**2.5.2 Types of Judaism and their meaning**

**2.5.3 Jewish Worldview**

## **Topic 3: Christianity**

### **3.1 - Introduction to Sacred Scripture**

Scripture as a textual record of salvation history; the concept of revelation; the biblical canon; literary genres; Bible interpretation.

### **3.2 – Jesus Christ**

Jesus Christ, the central hierophany of Christianity; historical research on Jesus; the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith; Jesus' message: the Kingdom of God, parables and miracles; the death and resurrection of Jesus.

**3.3 - Open questions: Ecumenism, liturgy, women in the church and authority in the church community**

## **Skills - Goals**

General degree-course skills
<b>Instrumental</b>
<p>Ability to analyze and synthesize social and religious reality, and to understand and properly structure the knowledge acquired.</p> <p>Organization and planning skills</p> <p>Ability to manage information: collection, analysis and retrieval of information from different sources.</p>
<b>Interpersonal</b>
<p>Critical and self-critical skills</p> <p>Ability to develop ethical and religious commitment</p>
<b>Systemic</b>
<p>Recognition of and respect for religious diversity and multiculturalism</p>
Specific area-module skills
<b>Conceptual (knowledge)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To analyze the phenomenon of religion in contemporary society as an anthropological and cultural reality (an approach to religious sociology).</li> <li>- To describe religious doctrine in terms of unity (structure of religious doctrine) and diversity (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism).</li> <li>- To analyze the key religions and cultures of today's world and their problems.</li> <li>- To recognize the different responses given in the past and present to the diverse range of issues raised and, in particular, to the question of religion.</li> </ul>
<b>Procedural (knowledge - practice)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To interpret religious trends apparent in today's society and to identify the basic features of contemporary religiosity based on an analysis of social reality. To distinguish the elements of these various religious expressions that respond to a genuine religiosity from those who manifest perversions of religion (religious fundamentalism, sectarianism, etc.).</li> <li>- To establish a constructive and critical dialog on the various religious expressions, their social impact, phenomenological structure and anthropological and theological foundations.</li> <li>- To analyze scientific texts on religious and social issues from a Christian perspective.</li> <li>- To look at contemporary reality with a critical eye and from the basic principles of Science and the Phenomenology of Religion.</li> <li>- To learn to detect socio-religious contexts marked by notable fragility and difficulty of access to religious freedom.</li> </ul>
<b>Attitudinal (knowledge - self)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To recognize and accept the diversity of customs, beliefs and existential responses to the same topic.</li> <li>- To be able to discuss, form their own beliefs and listen to the beliefs of others.</li> <li>- To approach the social and religious reality with analytical skills and critical judgment.</li> <li>- To develop an awareness of foreign religious contexts that the student may not have come into contact with before.</li> <li>- To develop a responsible attitude toward religious freedom.</li> <li>- To assess the importance of the religious dimension in shaping people's individual identity.</li> </ul>

## TEACHING METHOD

#### **Classroom method: activities and skills**

- Lectures will provide the theoretical explanations and guidance needed in order to study each topic. In these classes, the teacher will only focus on the most important or complicated areas. Following the teacher's guidelines, students shall complete the explanations. Students must have reviewed the material before class. To ensure that the student meets this requirement, the teacher may set short exercises before presenting the material, or after the class to check that students are following and understanding the content. The teacher is not required to give prior notice to students of this test.
- The lectures will involve the use of computer-based media (PowerPoint, Word and Excel documents), electronic media (DVDs), the whiteboard and any other methods deemed appropriate by the teacher.
- Group work and presentations of work by students

#### **Private method: activities and skills**

- Study of the theoretical content of the module.
- Preparation of projects on some of the topics covered in the module.
- Reading articles and/or books or chapters that afford a better understanding of the topics covered.
- Finding information in communication media and analyzing it based on the knowledge gained from this module.
- Team work based on the preparation and summary of a topic proposed by the teacher. Watching documentaries and/or movies related to the contents of the module.

**First four-month term – Introduction to Religious Doctrine - Christianity**

<b>CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES</b>											<b>PRIVATE STUDY</b>				
<b>Week</b>	<b>hrs</b>	<b>Lecturers</b>	<b>Seminars</b>	<b>Tutorial</b>	<b>Assessment</b>		<b>Individual work</b>	<b>Group work</b>	<b>Tutorial</b>		<b>hrs</b>				
1	2	Presentation of the module. Motivation and aim. Course syllabus. Program presentation. Goals. Methodology. Assessment Indicators. Bibliography.					Read and study the David Bohm article, "On Dialogue". Online test.				4				
2	2	Block 1 - Topic 1 1.1 Approaches to the study of Religious Doctrine.	Comment on the article "On Dialogue" and the test.				Study				4				
3	2	1.1 Phenomenology of Religion and elements of Religious Doctrine (The Sacred and the Mystery)					Study and application exercise. Analyze various phrases on the Mystery and identify its features (transcendence, immanence ...)				4				
4	2	1.1 The religious attitude and mediations. Methods for approaching religion: psychology, sociology, history, hermeneutics	Group correction of the phrases about the Mystery				Read and study definitions of the concept of religion by different authors. Application exercise on the elements of religious doctrine in Jewish and Christian texts				4				
5	2	1.2 Religious Doctrine in its current context. Globalization and secularization 1.2.1 The secularization of modern society	Discussion and explanation of the reading of Berger and the conversation between Bellah and Juergensmeyer				Study and read the P.Berger book, "A rumor of angels". Test on Chapter 3 of this book. Study and read the conversation between Bellah and Juergensmeyer "Rethinking secularism and religion in the Global Age"				4				



6	1	1.2.2 New forms of religion. The sect phenomenon and religious fundamentalism.	Discussion on the content of these articles				Read the Kate Pickert article, "The art of being mindful" (optional). Read the John Paul Healy article, "Involvement in a New Religious Movement: From Discovery to ..."				4
6	1	Block 1 Topic 2 2.1 The diversity of religions. General typology	Video on the history of religions				Study Read Chapter IV of the book "Encounters with Hinduism" by Horst Georg Pöhlmann				3
7	2	2.2 Buddhism. Overview.	Presentation of group work on Buddhism				Study the notes on Buddhism. Application exercise: Diagram of Buddhism from a phenomenological approach. Read the Sri Dhammananda article, "Day-to-Day Buddhist ..."	Preparation of a presentation on Buddhism			3
8	2	2.2 Buddhism.	Review the article by Sri Dhammananda, "Day-to-Day Buddhist practices", Video on the Buddhist experience				Study  Optional reading of the book "Buddha" by Karen Armstrong				5
9	2	2.3 Islam - Genesis and Doctrinal elements	Presentation of group work on Islam.				Comparative study of newspaper articles about Islam today.	Preparation of presentation on Islam			5

10	2	2.3 Contemporary Islam	Group work. Presentation on the contents of the three proposed newspaper articles. Video on Islam		Assessment of groups - Each group will receive feedback from their peers. The group presentation handed in will be assessed by the teacher		Study				4
11	2	2.4 Hinduism Historical evolution and fundamental features of society and the individual	Video on the Hindu experience and history of Hinduism				Study				4
12	2	2.5 Judaism  Key moments in the history of the Jewish people. Various types of Judaism. Jewish Worldview: A great common	Video of a conversation and interview with Jewish believers. Documentary about Judaism. Discussion on the articles.				Read articles in the weekly newspaper Haaretz about the Jewish religion. Commentary on the Barbara Lerner Spectre article  "Dis-assimilation: Reclaiming of Jewish Identity in Europe-The experience of Paideia"				4

14	2	<p>Module 3: Christianity</p> <p>3.1 - Introduction to Sacred Scripture – Revelation/Inspiration Concepts, Canon. Literary genres; Bible interpretation</p> <p>3.2 – Jesus Christ, the central figure of Christianity - Research on the Historical Jesus</p>	<p>Discussion on the chapters read.</p> <p>Correction of responses</p>				<p>Study</p> <p>Read any two chapters of the Elizabeth A. Johnson book, "Consider Jesus".</p> <p>Questions for discussion in groups and seminars</p>				4
14	2	<p>3.2 - The Message of Jesus - The concept of the Kingdom of God</p> <p>3.2 Transmission of the Kingdom of God. Signs, Parables, Teaching, Community of Followers</p> <p>3.2 - The Death of Jesus - Meanings. The resurrection of Jesus</p>	<p>Analysis of various biblical texts that refer to Jesus' resurrection.</p>				<p>Study</p>				4
15	2	<p>3.3 - Open questions: Ecumenism, liturgical renewal, the role of women in the church and the question of authority in the Christian community</p>	<p>Open debate on these hot topics</p>				<p>Study</p> <p>Open questions to be raised in class.</p>				4

## ASSESSMENT AND GRADING CRITERIA

Activities to be assessed	CRITERIA	Weight
<p>Written homework assignments. Exercises related to homework that are done in class (one minute paper, comprehension tests ...) Exercises done in class and participation. Test conducted in Moodle.</p>	<p>They must meet the requested content, format and delivery date to be accepted.</p> <p>The assignments will be marked according to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structure of the work.</li> <li>- Quality of documentation.</li> <li>- Originality.</li> <li>- Spelling and presentation.</li> </ul> <p>The tests will be marked according to the quality or accuracy of the response.</p> <p>Participation and attitude of the student in class is <b>taken into account</b></p>	50%
<p>Final development exam, and in exceptional cases an oral exam might be possible.</p> <p>The possibility of a multiple-choice test is under discussion.</p>	<p>Overall test on the contents in each section.</p> <p>The accuracy of the responses will be assessed in the multiple-choice tests (Mistakes bring the grade down).</p> <p>The exam will be marked according to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of concepts</li> <li>• Clarity of explanation</li> <li>• The conceptual relationship</li> <li>• The ability to synthesize</li> <li>• Use of grammar</li> <li>• Spelling and presentation</li> </ul>	50%

SUMMARY OF STUDENT WORKLOAD			
CLASSROOM HOURS			
Lectures	Seminars	Academically supervised activities	Assessment
30	15	6	3
PRIVATE HOURS			
Independent work on theoretical content	Independent work on practical content	Group work	Study
30	5	10	19

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

<b>Basic Bibliography</b>
<b>Textbooks</b>
<b>Chapters</b>
Selection of Chapters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• E.A. Johnson, Consider Jesus, Crossroad, New York 2005</li><li>• P L. Berger, A rumor of Angels, Anchor Books, New York 1970</li><li>• G Lynch, The New Spirituality, I.B.Tauris, London 2007</li></ul>
<b>Websites</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Portal de recursos de la asignatura <a href="http://www.upcomillas.es">www.upcomillas.es</a></li><li>- <a href="http://www.vatican.va">www.vatican.va</a></li><li>- <a href="http://www.religion-online.org">www.religion-online.org</a></li><li>- <a href="http://www.islamOnline.net/english">www.islamOnline.net/english</a></li><li>- <a href="http://www.webislam/">www.webislam/</a></li><li>- <a href="http://www.bharatadesam.com">www.bharatadesam.com</a></li><li>- <a href="http://www.sacred-texts.com">www.sacred-texts.com</a></li><li>- <a href="http://www.haaretz.com">www.haaretz.com</a></li><li>- <a href="http://www.jtsa.edu">www.jtsa.edu</a></li><li>- <a href="http://www.zubiri.org">www.zubiri.org</a></li><li>- <a href="http://www.churchofengland.org">www.churchofengland.org</a></li><li>- <a href="http://www.buddhanet.net">www.buddhanet.net</a></li></ul>
<b>Notes</b>
<b>Will be available on Moodle.</b>
<b>Other materials</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Universal Declaration of Human Rights Declaration on Religious Freedom</li><li>• Papal Messages</li><li>• Selected documents from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops</li></ul>

## Complementary Bibliography

### Text Books

- Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (Oneworld Oxford) 2008
- Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing* (Doubleday) 1999
- William James, *The varieties of Religious Experience* (Penguin) 1985
- Richard Lennan, *An introduction to catholic theology* (Paulist Press) 1998
- Karen Armstrong, *The great Transformation* (Anchor books) 2006
- Karen Armstrong, *A history of God* (Anchor books) 1993
- Nobert Bella, *Habits of the heart* (Univ of Calif Press) 1996
- Peter Berger, *A rumor of angels* ( Doubleday Anchor Book) 1970
- Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (Harper One) 1991
- James Martin, *Between Heaven and Mirth* (Harper One) 2011
- Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu Wisdom for all God's Children* (Wipf&Stock) 2005
- The Dalai Lama, *How to practice the way to a meaningful life* (Atria Books) 2002