

**St. Mary's Ecumenical Institute
Summer 2021**

Saturdays, May 15, May 22, June 5, June 12, June 19, June 26; 9 am to 2 pm

ST 782 Christianity & Its Critics

Rev. Christopher Dreisbach, PhD

Course Description

Christianity has faced critics since its inception. An *historical* look at this criticism offers a sense of the more enduring themes of such criticism coming from atheists, non-Christian theists, and Christians engaged in self-criticism or criticism of other denominations. Among the more common charges are that Christianity is harmful, irrational, and irrelevant. A comprehensive *theoretical* look takes into account criticisms of fundamental Christian beliefs, such as the resurrection and the second coming; Christian attitudes toward and uses of the Bible; Christian practices in liturgy and everyday life; and Christianity's social and political impact.

Taking both an historical and a theoretical approach, this course examines some of the more influential critics of Christianity, their arguments, and the contexts for these arguments, with an eye toward deepening our understanding of Christianity.

Course Learning Objectives:

1. Identify key moments in the history of the criticism of Christianity
2. Demonstrate skills in critical examination of texts and ideas concerning criticism of Christianity
3. Articulate their personal views about criticisms of Christianity
4. Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of one topic in the area of criticism of Christianity

Course Requirements

- **Reading:** Students should expect to read at most 900 pages of required reading and should come prepared to discuss readings in class.
- **Writing:**
 - Three 500-word critical reflection papers worth 30% of the course grade
 - One 2500-word final paper worth 50% of the course grade
- **Other:** Class participation worth 20% of the course grade

Required Texts (prices are from Amazon as of 2/27/21):

Bertolt Brecht, *Galileo* [c. 1609 CE] (Grove P, 1994). 160 pp. ISBN-13 : 978-0802130594; \$8.79 pbk

Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation: The End of Faith* (Knopf, 2006). 96 pp. ISBN-13 : 978-0307265777; \$15. 13

Christopher Hitchens, *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Twelve Books. Hachette, 2007). 307 pp. ISBN 13: 9780446579803; \$15.07

Christopher Hitchens, ed., *The Portable Atheist* (Da Capo P, 2007). 499 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-306-81608-6; \$14.65

S. T. Joshi, ed., *The Agnostic Reader* (Prometheus, 2007). 385 pp. ISBN:978-1-59102-533-7; \$21.99