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### TH 6304: British Christian Apologists of the Twentieth Century

In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Great Britain abandoned Christianity as its public “creed” (i.e., the set of assumptions informing social and political life) in favor of the worldview that acerbic but insightful British historian Maurice Cowling labels “ethical earnestness.” Reviewing Cowling’s massive history of this shift as documented in the writers of this era, David B. Hart summarizes this creed as “a new cosmology allied to a new moral metaphysics, constantly in ferment, producing movements and sects and new beginnings, but never straying beyond the boundaries of the world in which it believed: a universe of Darwinian struggle that, precisely in its savage economy of ‘nature red in tooth and claw,’ demanded of conscience that it assist evolution in its ascent towards higher ethical realizations of the human essence,” a self-contradictory worldview in which “the closed order of nature is at once merciless chaos and the source of our ethics; morality is both obedience to nature and rebellion against nature’s implacable decrees; progress demands at once universal brotherhood and (especially among socialists) a ruthless eugenic purification of the race,” unified by “its most obviously religious element: complete devotion to the future as an absolute imperative, requiring in consequence a renunciation of all faith in and charity towards the past—or, for that matter, the present.” Thus, “the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ struggle between Christian and anti-Christian thinkers for the moral and social future of England was not—as might be supposed—a struggle between religious and post-religious thought, but a war of creeds” (“A Most Partial Historian,” *First Things*, December 2003, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/a-most-partial-historian-36>, accessed 23 August 2011).

In this cultural development, England is arguably in advance of the United States by some decades. Study of those British Christians who sought to defend their creed against attack and commend it to a reading public increasingly representative of the alternative worldview Cowling describes may thus be of benefit to American Christians seeking to defend and commend our beliefs to our contemporaries. In any case, to the extent that the apologists for Christianity in Britain grasped fundamental aspects of Christian faith, their work can assist all subsequent believers to understand the Christian confession. This course affords the opportunity for close reading of several of the most significant works by these writers.

#### Course Objectives

1. Students will increase their familiarity with the writings of British Christian apologists of the twentieth century.
2. Students will gain in their appreciation of points at issue between the historic Christian worldview and the emerging post-Christian worldview.
3. Students will deepen their grasp of historic Christian faith by analyzing the appeals and arguments made by these authors.

### Weekly assignment

- 1) Identify the most important sentence in each paragraph of the assigned reading.
- 2) Based on this work, identify the thesis or topic sentence of each chapter in the reading assignment, and the principal subordinate points of each chapter that develop the thesis.
- 3) Come to class prepared to identify and discuss these. (The instructor reserves the right to administer reading quizzes, announced or unannounced, if it appears in discussion that students are failing to complete the reading assignment.)

### Semester writing assignment

Write an essay of seven to 10 pages comparing and contrasting two or more of the authors we will read on a point or points of importance in the defense they offer of the Christian faith. (I.e., the essay may consider works by the authors which we do not read in the class.) Email topic proposal to the instructor by December 6 for approval.

Plagiarism and citation of sources: Plagiarism is the representation of another person's work as your own and is a form of theft. This includes material composed by other students, purchased from an online paper mill, or copied from published books and articles or from the Internet. If in any assignment you employ material written by someone else, you must give the author proper credit, documenting the source with an appropriate citation and marking any words directly quoted with quotation marks (or with indentation if four or more lines are quoted). Failure to appropriately credit the sources you use will result in a reduction in your grade for the assignment in question and/or the requirement that you revise the assignment. Intentionally representing another person's work as your own will be grounds for academic discipline, including your possible dismissal from the School. For more information on how to acknowledge sources properly and avoid plagiarism, refer to the School's "Guide to Written Work" ([http://www.austingrad.edu/images/Resources/student/guide\\_for\\_written\\_work.htm](http://www.austingrad.edu/images/Resources/student/guide_for_written_work.htm)).

### Additional Resources

The primary resources used in the class will be the works of British Christian apologists detailed on the reading schedule below. In addition, you may find it helpful to consult the following:

1. Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England* (3 vols.; Cambridge, 1980–2001)
2. Ralph C. Wood, *Chesterton: The Nightmare Goodness of God* (Baylor, 2011)
3. Laura K. Simmons, *Creed Without Chaos: Exploring Theology in the Writings of Dorothy L. Sayers* (Baker Academic, 2005)
4. Victor Reppert, *C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: In Defense of the Argument from Reason* (InterVarsity, 2003)
5. Robert B. Slocum, *Light in a Burning Glass: A Systematic Presentation of Austin Farrer's Theology* (University of South Carolina, 2007)
6. Louis Markos, *Apologetics for the Twenty-First Century* (Crossway, 2010)

## Preliminary Reading Schedule

- Aug 30 Organizational Meeting
- Sept 6 G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908), chaps. 1–5  
(download: <http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924029192486>)
- Sept 13 Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908), chaps. 6–9  
(download: <http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924029192486>)
- Sept 20 Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas* (1933), chaps. 1–4  
(download: [www.catholicprimer.org/chesterton/st\\_thomas.pdf](http://www.catholicprimer.org/chesterton/st_thomas.pdf);  
alternate: <http://www.cse.dmu.ac.uk/~mward/gkc/books/aquinas.html>)
- Sept 27 Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas* (1933), chaps. 5–8  
(download: [www.catholicprimer.org/chesterton/st\\_thomas.pdf](http://www.catholicprimer.org/chesterton/st_thomas.pdf);  
alternate: <http://www.cse.dmu.ac.uk/~mward/gkc/books/aquinas.html>)
- Oct 4 Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (1941), chaps. 1–7
- Oct 11 Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (1941), chap. 8–Appendix
- Oct 18 C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (1943)  
(download: [http://www.archive.org/details/TheAbolitionOfMan\\_229](http://www.archive.org/details/TheAbolitionOfMan_229);  
alternate: <http://www.e-booksdirectory.com/details.php?ebook=88>)
- Oct 25 *Mere Christianity* (1952)(download: <http://www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/documents/apologetics/mere-christianity/Mere-Christianity.pdf>)
- Nov 1 Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief* (1964)
- Nov 8 Austin Farrer, *A Science of God?* (1966; American title, *God is Not Dead*)
- Nov 15 John Polkinghorne, *The Faith of a Physicist* (1996), Introduction–chap. 5
- Nov 22 NO CLASS MEETING
- Nov 29 John Polkinghorne, *The Faith of a Physicist* (1996), chaps. 6–Epilogue
- Dec 6 Retrospective; **TOPIC PROPOSAL FOR SEMESTER ESSAY DUE**
- Dec 13 SEMESTER ESSAY DUE**