Ploughshares Bible Institute

Course Catalog

Cultivating the Peaceable Kingdom

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About

Forging Ploughshares is an organization devoted to the notion that peaceful Christian living and teaching are inherently linked. Therefore, the Ploughshares Bible Institute seeks to extend the exploration of Christian peace in the community of the Church through accessible and affordable learning modules which are designed to inform and transform learners through theological and biblical study and dialogue within a larger community.

PBI is not an accredited learning platform but it is written, developed, and facilitated by men and women with relevant accredited education and experience teaching related subjects in the college, university, and church setting. The philosophy behind PBI is not opposed to accredited higher education but suggests that the structures and hierarchies necessary to make institutions "accredited" are designed to serve an economy which is inherently in tension with the alternative community called "the Church" which is established by the Gospels and expounded throughout the New Testament.

What this means for the learner: the Ploughshares Bible Institute is designed to provide the learner with a transformative learning experience with equivalent content and contact to a seminary-level education in an online format. The typical student who finds PBI attractive is a devoted Christian who desires to more fully understand and put into practice the very practical and peaceful Kingdom Jesus established within the community of the Church.

Cost

PBI modules are designed to be very inexpensive. Currently, the price to take a single 8-week learning module is set at $150. Because PBI modules are intentionally designed to provide structure for a rich understanding of Christian theology, they are topically interdependent on one another.

PBI learning modules are designed to be completed in 8 weeks (8 unit modules). Students should be reasonably able to complete them in 8 weeks. However, students who need extra time may request an extension of two weeks for a fee of $20.

Policies

Completion — To complete a learning module, students will complete every assessment. Students are expected to demonstrate the highest standard of integrity (complete all work themselves), especially as the assessments are designed to help the students learn.

Progression — The 8-unit format is designed to be completed in 8 weeks. It is ideal that students try to progress at that speed, in order to participate in the online discussions with other participants in the module. However, the module facilitator will work with students who need longer to complete each unit. If, during or after the 8 weeks, a student makes no progress or communication for 2 weeks, PBI will consider the student "withdrawn" from the module. A student who runs into a personal emergency may request a leave at no cost and finish the module at a later time.

Accessibility — Though the Ploughshares Bible Institute is a 501C3 and does not receive Title IV funding, its administrators and facilitators are committed to making any and all reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. This may include producing ancillary material in larger print and/or creating transcripts or adding closed-captioning to PBI-produced video content. If, after starting a module, necessary accommodations cannot be made and the student cannot complete the module, the student will be refunded the cost of the module.

Learning Objectives

PBILO 1. Students will gain familiarity with tools and develop basic skills for interpreting scripture.

PBILO 2. Students will develop a humble approach to reading the Bible, seeking to be shaped by scripture within the community of God.

PBILO 3. Students will read the Old Testament narrative Christocentrically and ecclesiologically.

PBILO 4. Students will study the life and work of Christ through theological frameworks provided by specific Gospel writers.

PBILO 5. Students will encounter an understanding of the atonement which exposes and defeats the problem of sin as a "world constituting system" and which provides access to the Kingdom constituted in the body of Christ.

PBILO 6. Students will encounter the Holy Spirit as the person of the Trinity who enables us to practice the work of the Kingdom.

PBILO 7. Students will encounter an eschatology which has immediate application to a lived theology.

PBILO 8. Students will encounter an atonement theology and ecclesiology which recognizes the "now" and "not yet" features of the Kingdom of God.

PBILO 9. Students will gain perspective on ancient and recent peaceful church traditions.

PBILO 10. Students will study the outworkings of the Gospel of Jesus within the community of the church and in relationship to creation.

PBILO 11. Students will develop a theological perspective on philosophical study.

PBILO 12. Students will conduct in-depth contextual and theological studies of New Testament books.

PBILO 13. Students will encounter an apologetic based on the narrative structure of scripture in which the aim is to witness to a conversion of the imagination.

PBILO 14. Students will encounter within the New Testament a Christian approach to issues of inequality and restorative justice.

PBILO 15. Students will gain perspective on the uniqueness of Christ among other religious systems.

Module Descriptions

Biblical Interpretation

INT 203 Reading the Bible in Community. A study of hermeneutics which provides skills and tools for biblical interpretation. The module focuses on coming to the text humbly within the Christian community. (PBILO 1, 2, 5)

New Testament

NTT 201 Matthew: Gospel of Kingdoms. A theological study of Matthew's Gospel emphasizing Jesus as the King of an alternative kingdom to the power structures of the world. (PBILO 4, 5)

NTT 203 Gospel of John: Book of Signs and Glory. A theological study of John's Gospel emphasizing John's key themes such as overcoming of darkness, the Kingdom of God overcoming the kingdoms of the world. (PBILO 4, 5)

NTT 207 Romans: Salvation through the Body of Christ. A theological study of the faithfulness of God revealed in Christ Jesus as articulated in Paul's letter to the Romans. Focusing on Paul's exposition of God making the world right through Christ. (PBILO 5, 7, 12)

NTT 215 Philemon and Ephesians: Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Paul. A practical development of radical forgiveness and reconciliation from Philemon and Ephesians worked out in healthy community. (PBILO 5, 12)

NTT 220 Colossians and Christology. An engagement with the history of Christology, including recent debates, with a view to practical spiritual implications.

Old Testament

OTT 200 Christian Theology of the Old Testament. A thematic study of the Old Testament focusing on interpreting key texts theologically in the light of the revelation of Christ in the Gospels. (PBILO 3, 5)

Culture and Religion

REL 300 World Culture and Religion. A study of world religions which aims to demonstrate how Christ exposes and defeats the religio-cultural understanding as it exists in several of the world's major religions and cultures as well as how Christ redirects and completes this understanding. (PBILO 5, 15)

Theology

THE 200 Sin and Salvation. An in-depth study of the meaning of sin and a description of the atonement as a defeat of sin and the basis of an alternative community in Christ. (PBILO 5)

THE 250 Marginalization and Restorative Justice. A biblical and theological study of the Kingdom of God approach to issues of power and inequality among oppressed groups including gender, race, disability, socio-economic status, etc. (PBILO 5, 14)

THE 300 The Work of the Spirit in the Kingdom of God. An advanced theological study of the Holy Spirit as a practical outworking of lived salvation as it looks forward to the telos, or end goal, of the kingdom of God in Christ. (PBILO 5, 6, 7, 8)

THE 301 Living in the Kingdom of God. A study of peaceful Christian traditions in light of the Constantinian shift with a view towards eschatology. (PBILO 5, 9)

THE 310 Christian Community in the World. A study of the Kingdom of God as it restores community and creation. (PBILO 5, 10)

THE 315 Imaginative Apologetics. A study of apologetics which shifts the focus from argument to reimagining the world through the person and work of Jesus Christ. (PBILO 5, 13)

THE 325 Rene Girard and Nonviolent Atonement. This course will sharply focus on how mimetic theory impacts our understanding of the death of Jesus. It will however range in conversation with other Christian doctrines as well as the insights to be gained from many of the anthropological sciences.

THE 340 Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled: Perspectives on Peace. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. \~ John 14:27

'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. \~ Jeremiah 6:14

What is "peace"—shalom, εἰρήνη, pax? In every age it is worth returning to Christ's promise of peace —"my peace I give you"—and questioning what it means for us here and now, as persons, as the Church, as the human race. Peace is something we all desire yet is apparently absent at multiple levels of human existence: internationally, politically, ecclesially, relationally, and personally. This class examines "peace" from various perspectives: Biblical, theological, philosophical, and inter-religious. We will examine various forms of false peace and ask what peace is positively, its metaphysical and religious status as a concept and as a lived reality. Is peace possible? How is it characterized? How does Jesus make peace? Can difference be understood, lived, and resolved, not in violence and victory but in cooperation and mutuality? We will be guided into such questions by voices past and present, including Augustine, Thomas Merton, Raimon Panikkar, William Desmond, Rowan Williams, and more.

THE 350 Philosophy for Theology. A critical study of philosophy through the lens of theology which reveals the inherent nihilism of the foundations of philosophy. (PBILO 5, 11)

THE 360 The Theology of Maximus the Confessor. This course introduces students to one of the greatest luminaries of the patristic era, St. Maximus Confessor (580–662 AD). A lay monk (thus he held no church office), Maximus's influence even in his own lifetime was immense. His torture and eventual death at the behest of political and ecclesiastical authorities were an attempt to extinguish his weighty influence, an attempt that failed: Maximus's ideas were vindicated 19 years after his death at the Sixth Ecumenical Council (681 AD) and his legacy has remained vital especially among Eastern Christian traditions. We aim in this course to grasp (1) Maximus's highly synthetic Christological vision of all things and (2) the way this vision illuminates the action or practices that comprise the spiritual life of Christians. What emerges might be described as a sustained mediation on this single verse: "\[These actions\] are a shadow of things to come, but the Body \[which casts it\] is Christ's own" (Col 2.17).

THE 370 Lonergan & the Problem of Theological Method. Bernard Lonergan, SJ (1904 - 1984) came to see the development of a modern scholarly method for theology as one of the most pressing challenges of 20th-century Christian thought. This course follows how Lonergan's view of theological

method as a task and a problem developed on the way to his 1972 book, Method in Theology, and its major breakthrough: functional specialization.

THE 380 William Desmond's Trilogy, Part I: Being and the Between. This is the first of a projected three-part class series, examining in detail William Desmond's Between Trilogy: Being and the Between, Ethics and the Between, and God and the Between. Desmond is an original and significant recent philosopher. He has written many books and essays, and his Between Trilogy represents the fullest systematic account of his thought, "metaxology," which seeks to "word \[logos\] the between \[metaxu\]," to give an account of the dynamic and relational world in which we live and act. His writing is simultaneously systematic, rigorous, poetic, and spiritual. This class will read the entirety of Being and the Between, with attention for its relevance to Christian theology, spirituality, and contemporary cultural/political concerns. Each class will include introductory comments/summary, short presentations on the assigned chapters, and extended time for discussion. Desmond himself has agreed to join the class for a discussion session after we have read through the whole book.

THE 400 Human Language, Signs of God. Human Language, Signs of God uses Anthony Bartlett's two books, Theology Beyond Metaphysics and Signs of Change, as one continuous argument. Underlying this sequence is the core perception that language is the privileged medium by which the biblical God, the God of nonviolence, is revealed to us. If God is going to invite us into a new sense and meaning of what it is to be human this has to happen through language, that is through "signs of God." Theology Beyond Metaphysics introduces the thought of semiotics and specifically in relation to the anthropology of Rene' Girard. Signs of Change traces a pathway of semiotic change of meaning through the text of the whole Bible.

THE 420 Metaxology. This course, taught by William Desmond will cover the philosophy and theology of William Desmond as it applies to ethics, aesthetics, peace, and the Christian life.