Director: Dr. Robert H. Stockmanwww.wilmetteinstitute.orgEmail:rstockman@wilmetteinstitute.orgVoice: (877)-WILMETTE

PTH390: Bahá'í Theology

Dates: December 7, 2017 – February 14, 2018

Faculty: Mikhail Sergeev

Course Description:

This course on Bahá'í theology (the study of God and creation and of the relationship between them) provides an in-depth study of many of the fundamental spiritual teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. The units are organized around a series of questions we all ask from time to time:

- Who am I (what is human nature)?
- How do I know (epistemology, or the study of the nature and grounds of knowledge)?
- Whom can I trust to guide me (the nature of Manifestations of God and their revelations)?
- What is the structure of reality (ontology, or the study of the nature and relations of being)?
- Where do I come from (creation and evolution)?
- Where are we going (an ever-advancing species and our eternal souls)?
- What is expected of us (our religious lives)?
- What is freedom and what are the consequences (free will, reward, punishment)?
- What difference does it make (theology in action)?

This course is ideal for anyone who wants to delve more deeply into the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.

Learning Objectives:

- To become familiar with major theological issues, common approaches to them, and the Bahá'í principles relevant to them.
- To acquire the ability to explain and discuss the Bahá'í approaches to theological questions in meaningful conversations and in situations of public discourse.
- To acquire a new appreciation and understanding of the Bahá'í revelation.
- To demonstrate the above in discussion postings to each unit, reflection papers, and a final course project.

Course Expectations:

This course is divided into one-week (or less) sessions beginning with an orientation unit and ending with a unit for review and summary. All units include readings, activities, and an online discussion among course participants. The course has been structured so that it typically requires an estimated 5 or 6 hours per week of reading and discussion.

During Unit 1, you will draft a personal learning plan (PLP) to define the goals you have set for yourself by participating in this course. If you are taking the course for credit, one of your goals will naturally be meeting the course expectations for discussions, activities, and a final project. If you are not taking the course for credit, we suggest you set goals that will help you develop your personal capabilities and will be achievable in and around your other daily tasks.

During the final review unit, you will refer again to your PLP and complete a self-assessment reviewing the extent to which you met the goals you set for yourself. In addition, learners seeking credit from their university will complete their final project (10-20 page research paper or equivalent) and submit it to the lead faculty.

Course Guidelines:

Your instructor will periodically review your progress in the course and be available to discuss things with you. The following guidelines will help you gain maximum benefit from your participation in the course and will contribute toward a rich and rewarding experience through dialogue with others. We recommend that you consider them when drafting your PLP.

- Complete the readings and activities for each unit. Afterwards, your first posting in the discussion area should make reference to the readings and activities in such a way that your instructor can tell you read the material and engaged in the activities.
- Post at least 2 message replies in the discussion area for each unit/session. Each post should contain substantive comments (i.e., a comment like "oh, that's interesting" is NOT substantive).
- Choose at least 2 different days each session when you will participate in the discussions. We suggest
 posting at least once within the first few days of the session, with your second post at least two days
 before the next session begins. By contributing more than one post on different days, you will help the
 group develop rich ongoing discussions.
- If you post on time (i.e., within the time period of each unit on the course schedule), others will be able to read and respond to your post.
- Keep a course journal to help you track your ideas as you work on your final project.

Course Project:

Your Personal Learning Plan (PLP) helps you focus on what you want to learn in the course and on what course project you might be interested in creating. The final project is a course requirement <u>only if</u> you wish to receive credit from an external agency. You will have an opportunity to share your final project with course participants.

The following is a short list of possible ideas for final projects. Learners may propose other ideas as well:

- Submit a research/reflection paper (about 10-20 pages including references) on a course-related topic.
- Create an artistic project related to the course with a written explanation about it.
- Alternative final project formats can be discussed with course instructor.

Certificate of Completion:

In order to be eligible to receive a *Certificate of Completion*, you must participate in a majority of the discussions, as well as complete a majority of available unit activities and the end-of-course self- assessment. Your first discussion posts within each unit should address the discussion topic and demonstrate understanding of the course/unit concepts. Additional postings should provide substantive comments to other participants that are thoughtful, relevant, and help to extend the discussion.

<u>Learners taking the course for credit</u> must also complete a final project. The Wilmette Institute will send a transcript to the learner and the external accrediting institution within a month of completion of the course.

<u>Learners who are not taking the course for credit</u> will receive a certificate of completion from the Wilmette Institute after course expectations are met.

Preparatory Tasks:

- 1. Watch the Director's Welcome Video, read about the Technology Requirements of the course, the Technical Assistance we can provide, and our ability to Accommodate Disabilities.
- 2. Update your personal profile (see instructions in section 4 of the Course Software Tutorial).
- 3. Tour the course website to get better acquainted with the elements of a course:
 - a. Open and glance through a few of the Unit pages, including the readings and discussion forum.
 - b. Look at the items in the sidebars (columns), especially Local Study Groups and Resources.
 - c. Take a look at the other elements on the course site, especially the instructions in the Reflection and Application Unit, as this will influence your Personal Learning Plan.
- 4. Read through the Frequently Asked Questions about our Moodle course management system.

Course Schedule:

Unit 1 Introduction Dec 7-10, 2017

In this unit, you will review the unit topics and dates, learn how to use Moodle (our course management system),

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set up your user profile, begin developing a personal learning plan, and learn how to post and reply in the discussion forums. Learners seeking university credit through their own university or an external agency will be required to design a personal learning plan to meet external standards, including active and ongoing participation in the course discussion forums, readings, assigned activities, and completion of a 10 to 20 page research paper or a project of equivalent complexity.

In any religion, theology and theological education involve the study of scriptural and authoritative texts. In the Bahá'í Faith these are the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the works of Shoghi Effendi, and the messages from the Universal House of Justice. This unit provides readings about the lives of the founders, their works, and the circumstances in which they were revealed or presented. Throughout the course various compilations from those texts on selected topics will be provided for the convenience of the students.

Unit 2 Who am I? Human Nature

Dec. 11-17

The identity discussed in this unit is not our unique personal identity with its particular history and 'quirks' but rather our philosophical identity, our nature and make up as human beings in general. Technically this field is known as 'philosophical anthropology' or 'theory of man.' This subject deals with how we are constituted as human beings regardless of time, place, culture, and outward circumstances. It shows us what is universal in all human beings and thereby provides the foundation for all ethical, social, legal, economic, and political philosophy. Problems and/or inconsistencies in the 'theory of man' inevitably show up as difficulties in our ethical, social, legal, economic, and political lives.

Unit 3 How do I Know? Epistemology

Dec. 18-24

This unit covers epistemology, or how we know things.

Unit 4 Who Can I Trust to Guide Me? Manifestation and Revelation

Dec. 25-31

This unit covers the primacy of the Manifestation as an Educator, and Bahá'u'lláh as the Primal Educator in the scope of Bahá'í Theology.

Unit 5 What is the Structure of Reality? Ontology

Jan. 1-7, 2018

This unit asks what is the structure of reality, otherwise known as ontology. We look at the overall view of reality as revealed to us by the Manifestation of God and human science.

Unit 6 Where do I Come From? Creation and Evolution

Jan. 8-14

This unit covers "Where do I come from?" from the two perspectives of divine revelation and human science.

Unit 7 Where are We Going? Ever-Advancing Species and Soul

Jan. 15-21

This unit covers the purpose and developmental process of human existence, both collective and individual.

Unit 8 Where is Expected of Me? Religious Life

Jan. 15-21

This unit covers the expectations based on the purpose and development process of human existence.

Unit 9 What is Freedom, What are the Consequences? Free Will, Reward, & Punishment

Jan. 15-21

This unit covers the interpretation of freedom in the light of divine revelation and the consequences of making choices.

Unit 10 What Difference Does it Make? Theology in Action

Feb. 5-11

This unit explores the adoption of the Bahá'í world view and whether its actualization results in happier, healthier, more socially productive and more spiritually minded human beings.

Unit 11 Reflection and Application of Learning

Feb. 5-1

In this unit, we discuss the course in general and the relationship of the various topics to each other and review the learning goals set during Unit 1. Those seeking credit through their local university will complete their final projects (15-20 page research paper or equivalent) over the next month and submit them to the lead faculty.