

**Fall Term 2026**

## **Identity and Theology: Exploring the relationship between gender, identity, and faith**

### **Course Syllabus**

**Course Code: A01EV5**

#### **Canterbury College Land Acknowledgment**

We respectfully acknowledge that Canterbury College resides on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie.

**Course Dates:** October 24, 31, November 7, 14, 21, 28

**Time:** Saturdays 10a-1:30p EST

**Delivery:** Online

**Instructor:** Rev Dr Chris Brouilliard-Coyle

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#### **Course Description**

This course explores how identity shapes and forms theology by engaging with alternative perspectives on God and humanity. It invites participants to reflect on their own identity and theological standpoint and how this influences the ways in which they choose to embody their faith and engage in relationship with diverse individuals. It provides resources to support allyship and advocacy for those with diverse identities, with a particular focus on those who are gender diverse.

#### **Course Objectives and Outcomes**

At the end of the course, students should be able to appreciate the gifts of diverse perspectives on God and the world as a way to create space for openness to diversity that better enables individuals to respect the dignity of every human being. This is not an apologetics course where issues about the validity and theology of gender identity will be explored. Rather the goal here is to offer wisdom and insight from the gifts of those who identify as gender diverse, to see these individuals as human beings created in the image and likeness of God with something to share out of their lived experiences. The hope is that engagement with voices that are generally muted in theological discourse invites a different kind of reflection on how our own identities shape and inform our understanding of God and the world regardless of whether or not we agree with the perspectives presented.

It will be important that respect for diverse perspectives is maintained throughout this course. Care will need to be taken to consider the difference between intent and impact. It is fine to

disagree with someone's perspective. How disagreement is articulated must be empathic to the identity and self-understanding of individuals to avoid potential harm. These are important skills to learn for those who are in contexts in which allyship, advocacy, and, ultimately, inclusivity are priorities.

### **Required texts**

The principle text for this course will be: Clare-Young, Alex. *Trans Formations : Grounding Theology in Trans and Non-Binary Lives*. In *Trans Formations : Grounding Theology in Trans and Non-Binary Lives*. SCM, 2024.

Other required readings include:

Kearney, Richard. *On Stories*. In *On Stories*. Thinking in Action. Routledge, 2002, p. 9-19.

Hartke, Austen. *Transforming: Updated and Expanded Edition with Study Guide: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians*. Presbyterian Publishing, 2023.

Soughers, Tara. *Beyond a Binary God : A Theology of Trans\* Allies*. In *Beyond a Binary God : A Theology of Trans\* Allies*. Church Publishing, 2018.

Lowe, Mary Elise. 'From the Same Spirit: Receiving the Theological Gifts of Transgender Christians'. *Dialog : A Journal of Theology* (Gettysburg) 56, no. 1 (2017): 28–37.

Mann, Rachel. 'The Christian God Is a Queer God: I Cannot Begin to Imagine Anything Queerer than the Doctrine of the Trinity'. In *The Christian Century (1902)*, vol. 139. no. 18. The Christian Century Foundation, 2022.

Featherston, Victoria. 'Queer Bodies in the Body of Christ'. *Consensus*. (Winnipeg, Man. :) 43, no. 2 (2022): 1–3.

Hollier, Joel, Shane Clifton, and Jennifer Smith-Merry. 'Mechanisms of Religious Trauma amongst Queer People in Australia's Evangelical Churches'. *Clinical Social Work Journal* (New York) 50, no. 3 (2022): 275–85.

Neumark, Heidi. 'The Transfiguration of Larissa: When My Parishioner Returned to Church, She Seemed to Have Crossed a Threshold That Revealed Her True Self'. *The Christian Century* 140, no. 2 (2023): 31–32. Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials.

### **Optional texts**

Selected reading is also suggested from: Shaw, Grace Ji-Sun, and Susan M. Kim. *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide*. Fortress Press, 2018.

Naidoo, Marilyn. 'So What's Your Story?: The Role of Storytelling in Nurturing Inclusive Congregational Identity'. *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019).

Anglican Church of Canada. 'Pastoral Liturgies for Journeys of Gender Affirmation and Transition'. General Synod, 2023. <https://www.anglican.ca/resources/pastoral-liturgies-for-journeys-of-gender-affirmation-and-transition/>.

## **Course Outline/Plan**

### **Part 1: Who is God?**

Required Reading: "God Dances With Us: The Theology in Story" (Clare-Young, p.11-14)  
Students are asked to bring Statements of Faith regarding the nature of God (for example: Creeds) from your specific faith tradition

Focus:

- Who is God?
- Who decides what is known about God?
- How is understanding about God communicated?
- To what extent is identity connected to understanding of God?
- What is needed to take God out of the box?
- What is gained by taking God out of the box?
- What is needed to unbox our own identities and dance with God?

### **Part 2: Who am I? Identity**

Required Reading: "Prelude: A Love That Will Not Let Me Go – Stacey" (Clare-Young, p.15-16);  
"Introduction" (Clare-Young, p. 17-36)

Optional Reading: "Introduction to Intersectionality" (Shaw and Kim 2018, 1–17)

Focus:

- Feminist Standpoint Theory
- Incarnational Perspective
- Introduction to intersectionality

### **Part 3: Telling our Story**

Required Reading: "Where do Stories Come From?" (Kearney, p.9-19)  
"Interlude 3: Desire for Connection – Jack" (Clare-Young, p. 68-71)  
"Narrating Our Experience" (Clare-Young, p.72-96)

Optional Reading:

Naidoo, Marilyn. 'So What's Your Story?: The Role of Storytelling in Nurturing Inclusive Congregational Identity'. *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019).

Focus:

- Stories and Storytelling in life and in Church
- Storytelling as a tool for sharing
- Importance of listening
- Themes of suffering, resilience, and joy – transforming understanding of marginalised communities through stories

#### **Part 4: Gender**

Required Reading: “Interlude 4: It’s Important - River” (Clare-Young, p.97-99)

“Sin, Sickness, or Specialty?” (Hartke, p.33-43)

“The Need for a Theology for Trans\* Allies” (Soughers, p.23-44)

Optional:

“The Beginner’s Guide to Gender” (Hartke, p.21-31)

Focus:

- Introduction to Gender
- Gender and Church
- Queer Theology
- Trans Theology
- Beyond the binary/gender expansiveness

#### **Part 5: Theological Gifts of Transgender Christians**

Required Reading: Lowe, Mary Elise. ‘From the Same Spirit: Receiving the Theological Gifts of Transgender Christians’. *Dialog : A Journal of Theology* (Gettysburg) 56, no. 1 (2017): 28–37.

“Breadcrumbs of Delight: Theological Anthropology” (Clare-Young, p.100-119)

“Interlude 5: ‘Gorgeous Gender Fuckery’ – Star” (Clare-Young, p.120-123)

Focus:

- Humans as co-creators
- Queering *hesed* love
- Mind-body relationship
- Gifting of Holy Spirit
- Mirroring
- Complexity

#### **Part 6: Theology – expansive perspectives on the nature of God**

Required Reading: “Dancing with God: Theology” (Clare-Young, p.124-144)

Mann, Rachel. ‘The Christian God Is a Queer God: I Cannot Begin to Imagine Anything Queerer than the Doctrine of the Trinity’. In *The Christian Century* (1902), vol. 139. no. 18. The Christian Century Foundation, 2022.

Focus:

- Queering God
- Lived Theology – understanding God through experience
- God’s pronouns – why these matter
- Christology – a gendered perspective
- Holy Spirit – evolving understanding

**Part 7: What story does the Church tell?**

Required reading: “Is Not That Wonderful? – Sam” (Clare-Young, p.145-148)

Featherston, Victoria. ‘Queer Bodies in the Body of Christ’. *Consensus*. (Winnipeg, Man. :) 43, no. 2 (2022): 1–3.

Hollier, Joel, Shane Clifton, and Jennifer Smith-Merry. ‘Mechanisms of Religious Trauma amongst Queer People in Australia’s Evangelical Churches’. *Clinical Social Work Journal* (New York) 50, no. 3 (2022): 275–85.

Neumark, Heidi. ‘The Transfiguration of Larissa: When My Parishioner Returned to Church, She Seemed to Have Crossed a Threshold That Revealed Her True Self’. *The Christian Century* 140, no. 2 (2023): 31–32. Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials.

Suggested Reading:

Anglican Church of Canada. ‘Pastoral Liturgies for Journeys of Gender Affirmation and Transition’. General Synod, 2023. <https://www.anglican.ca/resources/pastoral-liturgies-for-journeys-of-gender-affirmation-and-transition/>.

Focus:

- Spiritual and religious trauma
- Microaggressions, mischaracterisations, relational distancing
- Trauma informed relationships
- Being public, intentional, and explicit

**Method of Evaluation**

1. Class participation (20%): building relationships is based on communication that is respectful and reciprocal. Knowing when to listen and when to share is important to creating safe spaces for diverse individuals. Students will be assessed on meaningful and respectful engagement with the readings and each other throughout the course.
2. Positionality Paper (20%): Students are required to write a personal introduction of no more than 500 words highlighting aspects of their personality and story that they believe influence their theological understanding and relationship to God. Students can use the way Clare-Young introduces themselves and the participants as a model for this paper. This paper will provide the foundation for your final paper and thus should include an introduction to your faith journey as you understand it at this point.

3. Engaging with one story (20%): There are stories of a variety of Trans and non-binary individuals shared throughout the readings in this course. Select one of these individuals and write a 500-word reaction to their story. Include a description of one of the theological positions you identified from the individual’s story – what they are saying about God and the world, and your response to this position. To what extent does this individual challenge your theology? What have you learned from this individual? How has this individual helped you think more deeply about your own theology? Note: you do not have to agree with the individual, however, there is an expectation that the engagement with their story will be respectful.
4. Positionality Revisited (40%): Inspired by the theology and stories of the Trans and non-binary individuals in the readings and using your positionality paper, write a 1000-word paper which directly connects your story, including your sense of your gender, to your theology and the way you embody your faith. This paper should specifically focus on one concept. For example, how you understand the Trinity, a particular sacrament or practice, or a specific Biblical passage can be explored and the implications for the way you practice your faith.

A successful essay will include:

- References to your personal story and how this connects to your theological understanding;
- A description of the concept you are exploring and your understanding of it;
- A description of how your story, including your sense of gender, influences how you understand this particular concept;
- An example of how your understanding of the relationship between your identity and theology influences how you embody your faith.

## Grade Descriptors

A+	90-100	One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level
A	80-89	Superior work which is clearly above average
B	70-79	Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
C	60-69	Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59	Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	below 50	Fail

