

The Ten Commandments

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1 Course Description

As the first words spoken by God at Sinai and the leading terms of a covenant sealed with blood, the Ten Commandments are well known as a premier instance of biblical law. This course examines their ancient origins. It also considers the weight they have held for Jews, Christians, and others through an exploration of the Decalogue's reception history, in modes as diverse as liturgy, commentary, fine art, film, and popular culture.

Prerequisites: BF 1001 and RM 1000 or GTRS 6000.

2 Learning Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to: recite the Ten Commandments in a received order; and summarize the way different religious traditions count to Ten; locate and contextualize at least three versions of the Ten Commandments in the Bible; interpret each of the Commandments in their immediate literary contexts; integrate an understanding of the Ten Commandments with a broader view of biblical law; understand, in broad terms, how the Commandments have been interpreted in history; independently investigate the historic use of some Commandments; identify, evaluate, and report on contemporary connections with at least one of the Ten Commandments.

3 Required Texts & Materials

The following texts are required. Students are strongly encouraged to purchase their own copies. Visit the professor's website for links to [order the assigned editions](#).

- [Centuries] Jeffrey P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen, eds. *The Decalogue through the Centuries: From the Hebrew Scriptures to Benedict XVI*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012. ISBN 978-0664234904.
- [Miller] Patrick D. Miller. *The Ten Commandments (Interpretation)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009. ISBN 978-0664230555.
- [Rossetti] Christina G. Rossetti. *Letter and Spirit: Notes on the Commandments*. London: SPCK, n.d. [1883]. Public domain: <https://archive.org/details/letterspiritnoteooross/>

If you do not have access to a good study Bible, I recommend either the NRSV (Michael Coogan, ed.) or the NJPS (Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds.), both published by Oxford University Press. Both are also available through [Oxford Biblical Studies Online](#) (accessible with your AST student/faculty card barcode number and password).

4 Supplementary Texts

The following titles may be referenced as supplementary texts. They are not required. Other supplementary materials may be provided through the course website.

- [1] Carl E. Braaten and Christopher R. Seitz, eds. *I Am the Lord Your God: Christian Reflections on the Ten Commandments*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- [2] Michael Coogan. *The Ten Commandments: A Short History of an Ancient Text*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- [3] Bernard M. Levinson. *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- [4] Yair Hoffman and Henning Graf Reventlow, eds. *The Decalogue in Jewish and Christian Tradition*. LHBOTS 509. New York: T&T Clark, 2011.
- [5] Roger E. Van Harn, ed. *The Ten Commandments for Jews, Christians, and Others*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

[Making Sense] Northey, Margot, Bradford A. Anderson, and Joel N. Lohr. *Making Sense in Religious Studies: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing*. 3rd ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2019. ISBN 978-0199026838.

[SBL2] Collins, Billie Jean, et al. *The SBL Handbook of Style*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1589839649. Designed to augment *Chicago Style* (the standard at AST), there is also a free [Student Supplement for SBL2](#).

5 Course Outline

We will adhere to the schedule in [Table 1](#) as closely as possible, though the professor reserves the right to adjust it to suit the needs of the class.

Note that readings are listed by the textbook's key word and chapter numbers, except in the case of Rossetti, which gives page numbers.

§. Command	Exposition	Reception	Rossetti	Date
1. (Intro)		Centuries 11		11 Jan.
2. First	Miller Intro	Centuries 1	pp. 6–25	18 Jan.
3. Second	Miller 1	Centuries 2–3	pp. 26–45	25 Jan.
4. Third	Miller 2	Centuries 4	pp. 46–65	1 Feb.
5. Fourth	Miller 3	Centuries 5	pp. 66–85	8 Feb.
6. Fifth	Miller 4	Centuries 6	pp. 86–105	15 Feb.
~. No Class: Reading Week				22 Feb.
7. Sixth	Miller 5	Centuries 7	pp. 106–125	1 Mar.
8. Seventh	Miller 6	Centuries 8	pp. 126–145	8 Mar.
9. Eighth	Miller 7	Centuries 9	pp. 146–165	15 Mar.
10. Ninth	Miller 8	Centuries 10	pp. 166–185	22 Mar.
11. Tenth	Miller 9	Centuries 12–13	pp. 186–206	29 Mar.
12. (Recap)	Miller end	Film: tbd		5 Apr.

Table 1: Schedule of Readings

See the AST website for a list of other [important dates](#).

6 Evaluation

Given the small class size this term, I have adopted a tutorial format for HB 3113(Hyb).

1. Each week you will write a 1000–1200 word essay responding to a prompt.
2. Essays should interact thoughtfully with both primary and secondary sources, and should be **thesis-driven**. Your essay must argue a thesis, and not simply describe what you have learned or what others have argued. At the tutorial, you should know what you think about the question, and should be able to summarize the argument of your essay in one sentence.
3. Reading preparation should always give priority of attention to the assigned primary texts. Secondary literature will be important in lending guidance to the essay, but scholarly opinions should always be assessed on the basis of how helpful they are in explaining the primary text.

4. By email or Teams, please send me your essay as a Microsoft Word document by 4pm the day before class. Essays received on time will receive written feedback. Late essays are not guaranteed written feedback. If you do not provide an essay at all, class may be cancelled. Essays will not be accepted after class (with rare exceptions).
5. Written feedback will be returned by email or on Teams following discussion in the tutorial. Marks will not be assigned to the essays initially, and only in two cases later. Instead, affirmation and redirection will be provided as needed.
6. Select two of your best essays to revise and resubmit for a formal mark. Both essays must be submitted before the last day of class. You can opt to submit them early.

The breakdown for the semester's total work is shown in [Table 2](#).

Completion of All Essays	70%
Assessment of Selected Essays	30%

Table 2: Distribution of Grades

AST's [Academic Calendar](#) provides guidelines and detailed criteria for academic assessment. Marks are assigned by letter grade using these benchmarks (summarized in [Table 3](#)). Note that, at AST, a grade of "C" is deemed "Unsatisfactory."

A+	94–100	Exceptional
A	87–93	Outstanding
A–	80–86	Excellent
B+	77–79	Good
B	73–76	Acceptable
B–	70–72	Marginally Acceptable
C	60–69	Unsatisfactory
F	0–59	Failure
FP	0	Failure due to Plagiarism

Table 3: Outline of Grades at AST

7 Other Course Policy

Late work will not be accepted, except in genuinely extenuating circumstances. Students must submit something before the deadline if they wish to receive credit. Unless I state otherwise, assignments are to be uploaded by 11:59 PM (Atlantic) on the date indicated.

Essay submissions must be typewritten and double-spaced. They should be free from error. In this course they should follow SBL Style (see [\[SBL2\]](#) in [section 4](#), above). As a reminder, AST upholds an Inclusive Language Policy. Please use gender-inclusive language when referring to human beings. Our traditions have different norms for speech about God; therefore, you are free to use non-gender-inclusive pronouns when referring to God.

Plagiarism is the [failure to attribute](#) (by means of footnotes when writing or aloud when speaking) any ideas, phrases, sentences, materials, syntheses, et cetera, that another author has composed and that you have borrowed for your own work. Plagiarism is unethical. Academic penalties for plagiarism at AST are serious, and may include failure of the course or even suspension of further studies. Unintentional plagiarism is considered plagiarism. AST's Plagiarism Policy is found under that heading in the Academic Calendar.

Students should request permission to record a class or lecture. If permission is granted, or if recordings are provided (as in the case of an online or hybrid course), I stipulate that all recordings be for personal use only. They may not be shared or distributed.

If you have needs that require modifications to any aspect of this course, please consult with the instructor as soon as possible. Any documentation regarding disabilities that you wish to divulge to AST should be provided to the Registrar's Office, where it will be kept in a confidential file.

Finally, I encourage the conscientious use of laptops, tablets, and other technology in my classes. In classroom settings, realize that, as **cognitive psychologists have demonstrated**, "laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers." Do your part to foster an environment for dialogue by honouring the presence of your classmates. In online and hybrid settings, consider both the physical environment in which you choose to work and the virtual environment that you help create through your participation in various forums. Let your engagement in this course be marked by rigour and charity alike.