

*Religion Phi 667 - Fall, 2005 - Syracuse University*  
*Radical Theology: From Heidegger to Zizek*  
*John D. Caputo*  
*Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion and Humanities*  
*and Professor of Philosophy*

*Required Readings:*

Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference* (Harper & Row ppbk.)  
Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vols. 1 and 2 (on reserve)  
John Robinson, *Honest to God* (John Knox (2003) ppbk.)  
T. J. J. Altizer, *The New Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Davies Group Pub. ppbk)  
Mark C. Taylor, *Erring* (U Chicago Press ppbk)  
Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion* (Routledge ppbk)  
Charles Winquist, *Desiring Theology* (U Chicago ppbk.)  
Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (Columbia UP ppbk)  
Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (Columbia UP ppbk)  
Slavoj Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute* (Verso ppbk)

*Course Requirements*

- (1) Seminar Participation (20%)
- (2) 2 Research Papers (40% each)

These papers should be approximately 4,000-4,500 words long.

The paper should be prepared in accordance with a standard style sheet and should be correctly documented (notes and bibliography).

The topic of the first paper should be drawn from material covered in course up to and including Mark Taylor; the topic of the second paper should be drawn from material covered from Derrida on. Bibliographical assistance is available on line in the library homepage. I have also put all these books on reserve in the Bird Library so that you need not feel compelled to purchase all of them.

*Deadlines:*

Paper #1 - proposal due Oct. 4; paper due Oct. 25

Paper #2 - proposal due Nov. 15; paper due Dec. 16

*Office (HL 505)*

Although I have scheduled office hours—Tuesday, 3:45-5:30, Wednesday, 1:00-4:15—you should, for safety's sake, make an appt in advance by email at [johncaputo@comcast.net](mailto:johncaputo@comcast.net) or [jcaputo@syr.edu](mailto:jcaputo@syr.edu).

*Topic*

After an initial lecture sketching the idea of “radical theology,” we will turn to a succession of readings in the principal figures in this movement, beginning with its foundations in Heidegger and Tillich’s theology of culture and going up to its most recent expression in the work of radical theorist Slavoj Zizek. By radical theology I mean the work of reinscribing traditional or classical notions of theological transcendence, above all the idea of God, in a temporal, historical, cultural or secular context. Each week we will read an essay or selection from an eminent figure—there will be ten in all—in this movement and in so doing follows its genesis into contemporary postmodern theology.

The first half of the course might be called “From Heidegger to the Death of God.” We will begin with two main background figures. **Paul Tillich** set the stage for radical theology by arguing that God is the “ground of being,” a transcendence in immanence which gives meaning and depth to existence, not a particular even if highest being or person in a world beyond this world. One of Tillich’s principal sources was **Martin Heidegger**, and we will start the course with his landmark essay “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” which opens up the space of postmodern theology by posing the task of “over-coming onto-theology,” that is, overcoming the idea of God as a *causa sui* in favor of a god before whom one can dance and sing. Radical theology hit the streets and acquired a popular notoriety from two theological sensations from the 1960s. Anglican Bishop **John Robinson**’s *Honest to God*, is a transitional work that drew directly upon Tillich, Bonhoeffer and Bultmann, and so represents a certain episcopal or pastoral adaptation of the new theology and did so in an accessible

argument that rocked the British world. Its counterpart but much more openly “atheistic” version in the United States was **T. J. J. Altizer’s** *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, which drew heavily upon Hegelian metaphysics to argue that God (the religion of the Father) had kenotically emptied himself out into the humanity in Jesus and died on the cross (the Religion of the Son), thereby preparing the way for an “apocalyptic future” for humanity (the Religion of the Spirit). If Altizer represents “version A” of the death of God, the movement was fundamentally recast by **Mark C. Taylor’s** *Erring: An A/theology*, who argued that the older version remained confined within a metaphysics of presence that simply replaced God with “Man,” and that the new “deconstruction,” which advocated the “free play of signifiers” and the “dissemination” of the human subject and of the transcendental signified, was the true “hermeneutics of the death of God.”

The second half of the course might be viewed as taking up the discussion of radical theology “after the death of God” (in either version) in which we witness the emergence of a certain “return” of religion. Taylor had not anticipated a certain (re)turn of religious discourse in the “later” **Derrida**, who began speaking of the “undeconstructible,” the “pure messianic,” and a “religion without religion,” which sets the stage for contemporary versions of radical theology. We will read several key essays by Derrida in *Acts of Religion*. From there we will take up (Syracuse’s own) **Charles Winquist** (d. 2002), whose *Desiring Theology* contains a crucial statement of postmodern theology or as he called it “secular theology,” and brings together the work of Tillich, Derrida, Deleuze, Lacan and American process philosophy. We find a contribution to the postmodern theological scene in French feminist philosopher **Luce Irigaray**, for whom the “divine” is an immanent divine milieu of love which she conceives in terms of a new “feminine imaginary” of the elements, of air and water. Italian philosopher **Gianni Vattimo**, a longtime commentator on Nietzsche, Heidegger and Gadamer, has in recent texts returned to Christianity, interpreting the “death of God” and “nihilism” as a “hermeneutics of charity.” The course concludes with **Slavoj Zizek**, who like Irigaray and Vattimo (and following St. Paul), sees in the structure of Christian love a liberation from the destructive dialectic of the law and guilt. Zizek is a Marxist-Leninist, an atheist and a critic of “postmodern theology,” but his work raises the question to what extent he actually offers an alternative to it.

### *Syllabus*

August 30	Orientation: What is “Radical Theology?”
September 6	Heidegger, “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” in <i>Identity and Difference</i> (1956-57)
13	Tillich, <i>Systematic Theology</i> , I, 59-66 (Correlation); pp. 163-211 (Being and the Question of God) (1950)
20	Tillich, <i>ST</i> , I, pp. 211-93 (The Reality of God); <i>ST</i> , II, pp. 5-16 (Restatement of Answers Given in <i>ST</i> , I)
27	John Robinson, <i>Honest to God</i> (1963)
October 4	T. J. J. Altizer, <i>The New Gospel of Christian Atheism</i> (1966, 2002) Paper # 1 Proposal due
11	Mark Taylor, <i>Erring</i> (1984)
18	Jacques Derrida, “A Silkworm of One’s Own” (1996), in <i>Acts of Religion</i> , pp. 309-55

- 25 Derrida, "Hostipitality," (1997), pp. 309-55.  
Paper # 1 due
- November 1 . Charles Winquist, *Desiring Theology* (1995)
- 8 Luce Irigaray, "Belief Itself" (1980) and "Divine Women" (1984), *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp. 23-73
- 15 Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (2002)  
Paper #2 proposal due
- 22 Thanksgiving
- 29 Slavoj Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute* (2000), pp. 1-82
- December 6 Zizek, *Fragile Absolute*, 83-160
- 16 [Paper #2 due]