Now let us praise the Creator and Guardian
Of the heavenly kingdom, his power and purpose,
His mind and might, his wondrous works.
He shaped each miraculous beginning,
Each living creature, each earthly kind.
He first made for the children of men
Heaven as roof. Then our holy Shaper
Crafted middle-earth, a home for mankind:
Our God and Guardian watching over us—
Eternal, almighty—our Lord and King.

—Caedmon’s hymn, trans. Craig Williamson

Christianity begins with God’s creative Word: “In the beginning was the Word.” This course approaches the study of Christian poetry as an exercise in creativity, encouraging students to explore the history of Christianity as an expression of the poetic imagination. Readings will be taken from across the ancient, medieval, and modern Christian tradition, focusing particularly on works originally written in Old, Middle, or modern English as models for writing our own poems, but drawing on a wide range of exegetical, liturgical, and visionary works to support appreciation of the symbolism and narrative embedded in these models. Is there such a thing as a distinctively Christian perspective on history, morality, beauty, and art? What role does irony play? Is Christian poetry fundamentally tragic or comic? What is the relationship between Christianity and culture?

BOOKS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE AT THE SEMINARY CO-OP BOOKSTORE

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The main requirement for this seminar is to write a poem of 50 stanzas of 8 lines each (400 lines total) on a Christian theme of your choice. The reading and discussion assignments are intended to help you think about the meaning of writing poetry within the Christian tradition, as well as to give you ideas about topics and imagery to include in your poem. Each week there will be an exercise to help you think about the content and structure of your poem. Your poem will be due at the end of the quarter, but you should start thinking about it and collecting materials for it from the first week of class. Your final version should include footnotes and a bibliography to help me appreciate your use of sources and models, along with a short introduction (4-5 pages) to your poem.

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READING AND DISCUSSION ASSIGNMENTS

September 20 Creation
Aurora Bearialis, by the Dragon Common Room (work-in-progress)
Thornton-Norris, Spiritual History, pp. 11-38
Curtius, European Literature, pp. 3-35, 587-98

Exercise: Bring a favorite poem to class to read out loud.

October 7 Advent
(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2107), pp. 303-25
Thornton-Norris, Spiritual History, pp. 39-53
Curtius, European Literature, pp. 145-66, 446-75

Exercise: Write 20 lines of iambic pentameter in heroic couplets on your favorite feast day.

October 14 Heaven
Pearl, trans. J.R.R. Tolkien
Curtius, European Literature, pp. 183-246, 501-14

Exercise: Brainstorm theme for final poem. Choose model structure (e.g. quest, pilgrimage, vision, parable). Define model stories, including passages from Scripture. Collect models for verse form and theme.
October 21 Psalmody
Thornton-Norris, Spiritual History, pp. 55-67
Curtius, European Literature, pp. 247-301, 519-37

Exercise: Pick a psalm, and rewrite it in a meter of your choice. Compare your version with two other translations.

October 28 Story
William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, The Tempest
Esolen, “The Fullness of Time: Shakespeare’s Tempest,” in Ironies of Faith, pp. 112-51
Curtius, European Literature, pp. 302-47

Exercise: Collect reference materials for your poem: images, photographs, drawings, maps, costumes. Define main characters: traits, ways of speaking, style; philosophy and/or theology that they articulate.

November 4 Light
Curtius, European Literature, pp. 380-401

Exercise: Outline the plot of your poem stanza by stanza. Write Pixar-style “pitch.”

November 11 Fall
John Milton, Paradise Lost (in 12 books), books I, IV, and IX [https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/26/pg26-images.html]
Thornton-Norris, Spiritual History, pp. 69-81

Exercise: Write 10 stanzas of your poem.

November 18 Love
Thornton-Norris, *Spiritual History*, pp. 83-110

*Exercise*: Write 10 stanzas of your poem.

**December 2 Words**
Poems by Dana Gioia, Carl Winderl, and Malcolm Guite
Thornton-Norris, *Spiritual History*, pp. 111-55

*Exercise*: Write 10 stanzas of your poem.

**POEM (50 stanzas of 8 lines each, with introduction and notes)** DUE DECEMBER 9 by 11:59pm on Canvas.