**Sacra Doctrina: An Introduction to Christian Theology**

TH6301

Austin Graduate School of Theology

Fall 2015

Professor: Daniel Napier

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Conference: by appointment

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Class: Tuesdays, 1-3:40pm (Note: No Class on 20 October. This will be a reading week.)

Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to introduce the nature, tasks and language of Christian theology in the life of the church. After providing some initial definitions, we will turn to examine the nature of revealed knowledge and the basic content of the tradition of spiritual knowledge passed down through the scriptures and expounded by the church through the ages. We will give special attention to primary Christian doctrines including: the doctrine of God in its characteristic doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of creation (with theological anthropology as a key subdivision of creation theology), the doctrine of sin, the doctrines of redemption through the Son’s incarnation and his work of atonement. Finally, we will consider the character of the Christian life, the new community called church and God’s promise of a world made right.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will develop an appreciation of the necessity, risks and various modes of theological reflection in the life of the church.
- Students will develop a deeper understanding of the relation between theological reflection and personal spiritual development in the life of a disciple.
- Students will critically and charitably interact with a representative selection of classic theological texts, thereby gaining facility in reading and evaluating substantial theological texts from different times and traditions.
- Students will be able to define and properly employ a core of about 100 key theological terms.
- Students will be capable of discoursing on central doctrines of the Christian faith (Trinity, Creation, Sin, Christ, Church, etc…) with clarity, precision and grace.

Required Texts:

- Supplementary Readings are listed below in conjunction with the course section to which they relate.
Course Requirements and Means of Evaluation:

- Full preparation, attendance and participation in class sessions are mandatory. More than one absence or excessive tardiness may result in a deduction of up to 10% from your final grade.

- Each student will read and critically review Colin Gunton. 2002. The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine before the beginning of class on 27 October 2015. The book review will comprise 25% of your final grade. The written review shall not exceed 10 pages and will not be accepted late. The class will be given a reading week (no class on 20 October), so the due date for the review is final and firm.
  - Please demonstrate understanding of the book, through summarizing and analyzing its contents, before elaborating your personal assessment. Remember, it is a mark of spiritual maturity to be ‘quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger’ (James 1:19). The same is true of theological work in the church.

- Students will memorize the attached list of theological terms as described by Gonzalez and be ready to reproduce his definitions in summary form.

- Three quizzes will be administered. They will be fact oriented and brief, consisting mostly of short answers and definitions. These serve to monitor the class’ comprehension of the material as it is being delivered and thus allow midstream adjustments. Together these quizzes comprise 15% of your final grade.
  - The first quiz will be taken at the beginning of class on 6 October 2015 and will cover the first section of definitions from Gonzalez and basic definitions delivered in the first few lectures. This quiz will comprise 5% of your final grade.
  - The second exam will be the most abbreviated, covering only the second section of definitions from Gonzalez, and will be taken at the beginning of class on 3 November 2015. This quiz will comprise 5% of your final grade.
  - The third quiz will be offered on 24 November 2015 at the beginning of class and will cover the final portion of Gonzalez’s definitions. This quiz will comprise 5% of your final grade.

- I lieu of a major research paper, students will build a reading journal throughout the semester. In their journal, students will summarize the supplementary readings and interact with them through disciplined questioning.
  - This journal will be presented periodically to ensure continual progress and a grade will be assigned at the end of the semester.
  - A journal check will be conducted on 27 October 2015 upon return from the reading week. All readings must be up to date at that time.
  - The reading journal will comprise 25% of our final grade.
The final exam will be comprehensive and include essay questions whereby the student can demonstrate not only retention but also understanding.

- The final exam will be offered on 8 December 2015. The exam will cover the content of the lectures and the required readings. Essay questions will be designed to allow students to display integrative understanding of the entire course contents. The final exam will comprise 35% of your final grade.

Schematic Overview:

- Prolegomena: The Nature and Reliability of Spiritual Knowledge
  - What is Theology?: Definition, Tasks, and Overview of the Discipline
  - The *Sensus Divinitatis*: Why Knowledge of God’s Existence is Universal
  - Obediential Knowledge: Why Knowledge of God’s Character is Rare
  - Learning to Inhabit Scripture: Seeking ‘the Face of God for Now’

- From Everlasting to Everlasting: The Triune God and God’s Kingdom
  - The Mystery and the Economy: The Doctrine of God in Two Parts
  - God witnesses to God: Being and Character in God’s Self-Revelation
  - Thinking What Cannot Be Imagined: The Mystery of God’s Life as Three in One

- In the Beginning: Creation as the Christian Point of Departure
  - The Theater of Redemption: The Mystery of God’s Intentions Undergirding Creation
  - Human Beings *ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei*: Communicative Co-Dominion and our Destiny with God

- Roots of Ruin: Sin and Human Perversion
  (Supplementary Readings: Augustine, *Confessions*, book 2; Reinhold Neibuhr, *The Nature of Man*, ch. 7 and ch. 8, section 3)
“You will be like God knowing…”: Image of God and the Mental Roots of Sin

- Flesh and Soulish Existence: From Twisted Thinking to Sin in our Members

- The Economy of Redemption: God’s Project in History
  (Supplementary Readings: Athanasius, On the Incarnation; Augustine, Sermons 227, 228B; The Chalcedonian Definition; Aaron Preston, ‘Redeeming Moral Formation: The Unity of Spiritual and Moral Formation in Willardian Thought’, Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care 2010 3/2, pp. 206-229; John C. Gibbs, Moral Development and Reality: Beyond the Theories of Kohlberg and Hoffman, ch. 8)

- Presence and Absence: God’s Progressive Self-Revelation in History
  - The Mystery of the Incarnation: The Two Natures of Christ and God’s Fulfillment of Human Destiny
    - Orienting Soteriology: Assumptions, Issues and Starting Points
    - Viewing the Cross from Easter Morning: Making Sense of the Atonement
  - Invited and Indwelt: Understanding the New Community Called Church
    - New Character, New Capacities and New Communication: The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church
    - Salvation is a Life: Spiritual Progress as Double Justification or Sanctification?
    - Ongoing Mediation: God’s availability in the Church through Water, Bread and Wine

- The World Made Right: God’s Project, Human History and Modes of Deathless Life

Select Bibliography for Further Exploration:

• McIntosh, Mark A. *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs Von Balthasar.* Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996.