

The Church's Faith: An Introduction to Christian Theology  
TH4312  
Austin Graduate School of Theology  
Spring 2017

Professor: Daniel Napier  
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Class: Monday, 1-3:40pm

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:

- Justo Gonzalez. *Essential Theological Terms*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.
- Colin Gunton. *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*. Blackwell, 2002.
- Supplementary Readings are listed below in conjunction with the course section to which they relate.

Recommended Texts:

- McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.

Course Requirements and Means of Evaluation:

- Full preparation, attendance, and participation in class sessions are mandatory. Reading of all required materials is mandatory. More than one **absence or excessive tardiness may result in a deduction of up to 10% from your final grade.**
- Students are required to read Colin Gunton. *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*. Malden, Ma.: Blackwell, 2002. over the course of the semester.
- Each student will **read and critically review one of the approved books before the beginning of class on 24 April 2017. The book review will comprise 35% of your final grade.** The written review shall not exceed 10 pages and **will not be accepted late.**
  - The review must reflect the thorough conceptual analysis characteristic of level 3 reading as described in Mortimer Jerome Adler and Charles Lincoln Van Doren. 1972. *How to Read a Book*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
  - 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 definitions in a summary form. For help in summarizing, one may consult McKim 2014, however, one should be sure to read the discussions in Gonzalez.
- 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 13 February 2017 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 quiz will be more abbreviated, covering only the second section of definitions from Gonzalez, and will be taken at the beginning of class on 6 March 2017. **This quiz will comprise 5% of your final grade.**
  - The third quiz will be offered on 10 April 2017 at the beginning of class and will cover the final portion of Gonzalez’s definitions. **This quiz will comprise 5% of your 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 6 December 2016**. 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 50% of your final grade.**

Approved Options for Book Review:

- Chan, Simon. *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998.
- Conyers, A J. *The Eclipse of Heaven: The Loss of Transcendence and Its Effect on Modern Life*. South Bend, Ind: St. Augustine's Press, 1999.
- Conyers, A J. *The Listening Heart: Vocation and the Crisis of Modern Culture*. Dallas: Spence Pub. Co, 2006.
- Gunton, Colin. *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*. Malden, Ma.: Blackwell, 2002
- Willard, Dallas. *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge*. Harper One, 2009.
- Wright, N.T. *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*. Harper One, 2010.

Schematic Overview:

- Prolegomena: The Nature and Reliability of Spiritual Knowledge  
(Supplementary Readings: Origen, *On First Principles*, prologue; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Pt.1, Q.1, Art. 1-10; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.1-5; Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, ch. 2)
  - 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  
(Supplementary Readings: *Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds*, Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past*, ch. 4; Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. vol. 1, ch. 4)
  - 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  
(Supplementary Readings: Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, 5.3-7; 5.12; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.15; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, pp. 202-231)
  - 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
- Renewed to the Image: New Testament and Patristic Developments in the Imago Dei
  
- Roots of Ruin: Sin and Human Perversion  
(Supplementary Readings: Augustine, *Confessions*, book 2; Reinhold Niebuhr, *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 Soulful 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:

- Allen, Diogenes. *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Atlanta, Ga: John Knox Press, 1985.
- Allen, Diogenes. *Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today*. Cambridge, Mass: Cowley Publications, 1997.
- Daniélou, Jean. *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964.
- Daniélou, Jean. *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973.

- Daniélou, Jean. *The Origins of Latin Christianity*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977.
- Daniélou, Jean. *Prayer: The Mission of the Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996.
- Ford, David. *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.
- Grenz, Stanley J, and Roger E. Olson. *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- Gunton, Colin E. *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Gunton, Colin E. *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Ladner, Gerhart B. *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
- Lindbeck, George A. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984.
- Loder, James E. *The Transforming Moment*. Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2007.
- McGuckin, John A, and Cyril. *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy : Its History, Theology, and Texts*. Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004.
- McIntosh, Mark A. *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs Von Balthasar*. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1991.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Smedes, Lewis B. *All Things Made New: A Theology of Man's Union with Christ*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970.
- Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Volf, Miroslav. *After Our Likeness: The Church As the Image of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.
- Wilken, Robert L. *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Wilken, Robert L. *Remembering the Christian Past*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1995.
- Wright, Christopher. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove, Ill:IVP, 2006

- Zizioulas, Jean. *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985.
- Zizioulas, Jean, and Paul McPartlan. *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*. London: T & T Clark, 2006.