The Church’s Faith: An Introduction to Thinking Theologically
TH4312
Austin Graduate School of Theology
Spring 2016

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Class: Tuesday 7-9:40pm

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 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.

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.
  - The written review should not exceed 10 pages.
  - The review must reflect the thorough conceptual analysis characteristic of level 3 reading as described in Mortimer Jerome Adler and Charles

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 defined by Justo Gonzalez. 2005. *Essential Theological Terms* and be ready to recognize and/or 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. Together they **will comprise 15% of your final grade (so 5% each).**
- 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 9 May 2016. The exam will cover the content of the lectures. Short answers will help assess grasp of basic concepts and terms. Essay questions will be designed to allow students to display integrative understanding of major themes within the course content. **The final exam will comprise 35% of your final grade.**

**Required Texts:**


**Schematic Overview and Course Schedule:**

**Prolegomena: The Nature and Reliability of Spiritual Knowledge**

- From ‘the Way’ to Theology via Philosophia Christiana
- Definition and Task of Theology
- The *Sensus Divinitatis*: Why Knowledge of God’s Existence is Universal
- Obediential Knowledge: Why Knowledge of God’s Character is Rare
- Models of Scriptural Authority

**From Everlasting to Everlasting: The Triune God and God’s Kingdom**

- God witnesses to God: Being and Character in God’s Self-Revelation
- The Mystery of God’s Life as Three in One: Scriptural Roots
- The Mystery of God’s Life as Three in One: Patristic Formulations

**In the Beginning: Creation as the Christian Point of Departure**

- The Theater of Redemption: The Mystery of God’s Intentions Undergirding Creation
- Mediated Creation and Real Causality: The Relation of Eternal God to a Temporal World
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
- “You will be like God knowing…”: The Doctrine of Sin in Gen. 1-3
- The Image of God and the Mental Roots of Sin in Paul’s Writings
- Flesh and Soulish Existence: From Twisted Thinking to Sin in our Members

The Economy of Redemption: God’s Project in History
- Presence and Absence: God’s Progressive Self-Revelation in History
- Orienting Soteriology: Assumptions, Issues and Starting Points
- Jesus’ Soteriology: The Seminal Word and the Fecundity of the Cross
- Paul’s Soteriology: Viewing the Cross from the Damascus Road
- Historical Models of the Atonement
- The Mystery of the Incarnation: The Two Natures of Christ and God’s Fulfillment of Human Destiny
- New Character, New Capacities and New Communication: The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church
- Invited and Indwelt: Understanding the New Community Called Church
- 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: