Course Description

A study of theological prolegomena (introduction, theological method), doctrine of Scripture (revelation, inspiration, authority), theology proper (God, Trinity, creation, providence) and anthropology (man, Fall, sin). Our survey of doctrine will be based on the exegesis of Scripture, with continual reference to historical theology. All along we will remember the crucial nexus between faith and life, doctrine and practice, and thus endeavor to stress the importance of these doctrines for Christian thought, life, and ministry.

“…the battle cry of ‘Exegesis, exegesis, exegesis!’ that I hear coming from some sections of the evangelical world has its shortcomings here as well. Of course, exegesis is a basic element of all sound theology; but, like the foundations or frame of a house, if that’s all there is, you’re going to get wet, very wet, when it rains. It can lead to a fragmentary approach to the Bible which never sees the whole picture, or the priorities which exist within the overall witness of scripture. It can be profoundly anti-intellectual, eschewing all questions that a superficial reading of the text does not raise. Its frequent failure to rise to theological and ethical synthesis, and to engage modestly and thoughtfully with the priorities of the creedal and confessional trajectories of the church, leaves it inadequate to deal with really big issues in any kind of historical, social or ecclesiastical perspective. Exegesis is important; but it needs to stand in relation to other theological and ethical tasks if it is not to prove itself the basis for a highly unstable, selective and inconsistent church policy. Preachers, as well as believers, have their pick-'n-mix priorities, against which the testimony of the centuries, embodied in the creeds and confessions, can go some way to help. No-one, therefore, should be allowed within a million miles of a pulpit who does not have a proper respect for biblical theology in terms of the overall story of redemptive history, a firm grasp of the importance of systematic theology, creeds and confessions, and a critical handle on contemporary culture. Only then can he begin to deal with the latest big thing in any kind of biblical, theological and historical perspective.”

Carl Trueman
The Wages of Spin
(Mentor, 2005)

Prerequisites

MDiv Students who are wondering as to the value of Systematic Theology to preaching should consult the following:

Course Objectives

The principal aim of the Systematic courses (1ST508, 1ST512, and 1ST518) is to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the main doctrines of Christianity. The course aims at introducing the student to the discipline of systematic theology, in particular, to Theological Prolegomena, and the doctrines of Scripture, God and man. Students should have a competent grasp of the issues involved and a facility to communicate them with some fluency. Some memorization is essential in this process. Theology is both exegetical and historical, sociological and ecclesiastical, biblical and systematic. Tensions often arise when one aspect is stressed at the expense of another. This is a course in systematic theology—concerned with the answer to a series of inter-related questions: What does the entire Bible teach on a specific issue? How have theologians of the past and present formulated this issue? Answers to these questions are often expressed confessionally, and many branches of the church require of their ordained clergy (teaching elders) a commitment to these doctrines in a more or less strict sense. Students ought to be able to handle themselves well in the modern debate over controversial issues. Many students will be examined on these doctrines in church courts and this objective will also be maintained. Additionally, all good theology should be doxological. Obedience in worship will be the chief objective of this course.

Note should be taken of the following quotations:

“Theology seems often to the outsider just so much word-spinning air-borne discourse which never touches down except disastrously.” [Ian Ramsey, Models for Divine Activity (London: SCM Press, 1973), 1.]

“There are theologians in the bottom of hell who are more interested in their own thoughts about God than in God himself.” [C. S. Lewis]

“Theology is the science of living blessedly for ever” [William Perkins, The Golden Chaine (1590), 1]

Students should achieve the following:

1. A basic familiarity with the traditional loci of Christian theology
2. Acquaintance with the history of Christian thought, particularly its Patristic, Protestant, Puritan (Westminsterian) and Modern phases.
3. Awareness of contemporary challenges to Christian orthodoxy and an ability to assess their strengths and weaknesses
4. Critical awareness of current trends in Christian theology
5. Familiarity with the tools and resources available for study of theological issues; and an ability to use these tools for independent research and analysis
6. A sense of theological proportion, enabling the student to distinguish between what is primary and what is secondary in Christian doctrine
7. The development of a respect for traditional theological formulations together with an ability to critically evaluate them

Theological Standpoint

The course will be taught from the standpoint of a personal commitment to the Westminster Confession of Faith (full disclosure of presuppositional bias!). In particular, it reflects the theology of sixteenth and seventeenth century theologians (students advocating separation rather than continuity in theological expression here need to read the 4-volumed work of Richard Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics 4 vols. (Baker, 2003), before challenging the professor about it!). In particular, students will detect a penchant for puritan theologians of the caliber of Owen, Manton, Sibbes and Charnock. Scottish sympathies abound, especially for William Cunningham (his view of Calvin on the Supper notwithstanding). Additional input will be
evidenced from the Princetonians (Warfield and Hodge), the wisdom of John Murray (his four-volume set of “complete writings” ought to be in every student’s library). As the professor gets older, greater recognition of theology’s Patristic roots are taking shape.

Teaching/Class Methodology

Lectures will cover all the major topics, but there will not be uniformity. Some topics are more important than others. Some topics are covered adequately in the reading material (when this is the case, it will be pointed out in class).

Course Requirements

I. READING

Required Texts

**Careful reading is required of the following materials:**

- Stephen Prothero, *God is NOT ONE* (**SP**) (HarperOne, 2010) (330)
- J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Tyndale House, 2001) (**reference only**)
- Donald MacLeod, *Shared Life* (**SL**), 1-96. (96)
- Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Eerdmans)

*Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechism* (Free Presbyterian Publications): **WCF** 1-9; **WLC** 1-29; 91-152; **WSC** 1-19.

Occasional texts (**these will be made available electronically**):

- Carl Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, BT 75.2. H521 V. 3 c. 2, pp. 403-487.
Weekly Quizes

There are 12 reading quizzes which can be taken at any time. These will be mailed to a “proctor” – either someone at RTS Houston or your local church. They may be taken at any time during the semester but must be completed by May 1, 2011. Please e-mail my Jackson TA, Ryan Biese for scheduling. His e-mail address is rfbiese@gmail.com. These will be mailed directly to the proctor who in turn will mail/e-mail your results back to Ryan.

Reading Schedule

1. SNEB 1-76; ICR, pp. 35-51.
2. SNEB 77-end; ICR, pp. 51-74; Carl Henry, God, Revelation, and Authority, III: 403-487; Benjamin B. Warfield, “God-Inspired Scripture,” in The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, pp. 229-283.
4. SP 169-202; ICR, pp. 93-99; HB, pp. 95-255.
6. ICR, pp. 116-120; Donald MacLeod, SL, pp. 1-96.
7. ICR, pp. 120-159; HB, pp. 256-336
8. ICR, pp. 159-183; Karl Barth, “Vestigium Trinitatis,” in Church Dogmatics, I/1: 333-347; HB, pp. 337-442
10. ICR, pp. 197-210; John Murray, Collected Writings of John Murray, II:3-46; John Frame, A Theology of Lordship: The Doctrine of God, pp. 543-599.

II. Class Attendance

Class attendance will be imperative for successful completion of this course.
I do not permit the use of LAPTOPS during class time.

Students are expected to bring their copies of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Free Presbyterian), and the Bible to class every day.

III. Evaluation

The course will be divided into three unequal parts: Quizzes (30%), précis requirements (20%), and a final examination (50%).

a. Quizzes (30%)
   These are based on the scheduled reading assignments. Quizes will take place at 8.20 am on Thursdays.

b. Précis requirement (20%)
   A précis is a concise abridgement of a larger treatment, or summary of a particular topic. In this exercise, the student will prepare a (no more than) one page précis of his views and understanding of 6 major doctrinal topics:
   1. Scripture
   2. God
   3. Trinity
   4. Creation
   5. Providence
   6. Man

   These précis' should be typed. Students may not work together on this assignment.

   A sample précis is given in the appendices section at the end of this syllabus.

   J. I. Packer does a great job of providing a précis for most doctrines in his book *Concise Theology*. Refrain from merely duplicating his material! The professor has two copies of this book already!

c. Final Exam (50%)
   The examination will cover the entire material, including the reading material, and will test the student's competence to integrate it into his overall theological skills. You may expect the examination to lengthy, requiring detailed knowledge.

d. Extra Credit (5%)
   This will NOT guarantee an A in this course, but it could help towards a better grade. Students wishing to ensure a better grade may write an additional 7-page summary paper evaluating one of the following works (due RTS Paper Day):
   - Douglas Kelly *Creation and Change* (Christian Focus Publications)

   Should you need to contact me, you may do so the following e-mail address: 
   dthomas@rts.edu
Précis sample 1

Précis on Union with Christ

D Thomas: “It is impossible to think of any aspect of salvation without thinking of union with Christ”

“Soteriology bridges the gap between Anthropology and Christology. Christ accomplished what man did not and could not” (Kelly, 35)

“Reformed Soteriology takes its starting point in the union established in the pactum salutis (Covenant of Salvation)…” (Berkhof, 418) Because of this, it ought to precede any discussion of the ordo salutis (cf. Murray, 161, and Berkhof, 448, where the discussion is similar though the terms a bit different).

“It is through this union to X that the whole application of redemption is effectuated on the sinner’s soul.” (Dabney, 612)

I. In Three Dimensions

A. Eternal Union

1. Dimension of the Union that transcends our personal existence, this is not an existential union (see below)

2. Source: the election of the Father before the foundation of the world
   a. “God cannot think of past, present, or future apart from Christ” (Murray, 164)
   b. Chosen in Christ
   c. Monergistic

3. Scripture references: Eph. 1:3-14

B. Incarnational Union

1. Defined: when we become actual partakers of Christ at point of application of redemption (cf. Ephesians 2:12 esp. in light of what was written in chapter 1, Eph 2:3, I Cor. 1:9, the implications of John 3:36, Rom 8, Heb 2:11-15, Gal. 4:4-5, John 14:23, John 17 esp. verses 20-23)

2. Spiritual – i.e. bond of the union is the Holy Spirit himself
   a. Essential bond – the Holy Spirit
   b. Instrumental bond – Faith

3. Mystical –i.e. kept secret until manifested and made known in accord with will of God – “the fact that it is a mystery underlines the preciousness of it and the intimacy of the relation it entails” (Murray, 167).
   a. Organic and vital
   b. Mediated by the Holy Spirit
   c. Implies reciprocity
   d. It is both personal and transformational

4. Exemplified: Acts 9:4 “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (also, I Cor 12, 14, Ephesians 4)

C. Existential Union

1. Defined: How we live in light of our union
   a. This part of the union is synergistic?? (cf. Warfield???)
   b. While we are influenced by our past life, Christ’s past is dominant (Rom 6, I Cor. 15:21-23).
   c. We are becoming more fully human as effect of union as the dross of sin is burned away

2. This union is NOT our deification

3. Especially note Calvin III.i.

II. Images

A. Old Testament – High priest and suffering servant of Isaiah
B. New Testament
   1. Head to body (Col 1:8, Eph 4:15-16)
   2. Wife/Husband (Eph 5)
   3. Vine/branches (John 15)
   4. Chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20-22, I Peter 2:4-5)

III. Benefits that accrue to believer because of this union

A. Legal union – justification
B. Spiritual union – transforming power of Christ dwelling within
C. Fellowship with Christ
D. Communion of saints

Selected Bibliography

Berkhof, Louis. Systematic Theology, 447-453
Calvin, Jean. Institutes of the Christian Religion, esp. III.i.1-4, II.ii.7
Dabney, R.L. Systematic Theology, Lecture LI, 612-617
Kelly, D.F. Systematic III Notes, 36-47
Murray, John. Redemption Accomplished and Applied, 161-173