Introduction to Apologetics (2 Credit Hours)
Professor: Payne
Spring 2006
Reformed Theological Seminary
Jackson, Mississippi

Course Syllabus

This course is designed to introduce the student to the theory and practice of apologetics from a Reformed perspective. In an age of increasing disillusionment concerning any commitments to absolutes other than for purely psychological reasons, the church (believers) faces challenges that cut to the heart of our Christian convictions. The course is specifically designed to address the issues raised by postmodernism.

Postmodern Age: This is the age of normal nihilism (Nietzsche), an age in which there can be no truth but only interpretation.

How are we in fact to do apologetics in such an era? In this course we will demonstrate how Reformed Theology provides the framework out of which apologetics is to be conceptualized and practiced. Above all, the inerrant Word of God and its testimony concerning the Son of God (Jesus Christ) will be our starting point for engagement with the world.

Course Goals and Objectives:

1. The student will be familiar with the cultural and philosophical milieu of contemporary Western Society as it impacts our practice of apologetics.
2. The student will be reminded of the importance of a Reformed perspective on and the apologetic implications flowing from: a) The Doctrine of God, b) The Doctrine of Man, c) The Doctrine of Scripture, and e) The Doctrine of the Church.
3. The student will be better equipped to engage in evangelistic conversation with an apologetic character.

Course Readings: Books and Articles

Reason for the Hope Within, ed. Michael J. Murray (read by end of March)
Unapologetic Theology by William Placher (read in entirety by end of February)
Tacit Knowing (Mars Hill Audio Series on the thought of Michael Polanyi)
Reason and the Heart by William J. Wainwright (Cornell University Press) (read in entirety by end of February)
Reason within the Bounds of Religion, Nicholas Wolterstorf.

“Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Corinthians 2: 6-16” (WTJ) by Richard B. Gaffin (on reserve) (read by end of March)
“Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narratives and Apologetics: The Ad hominem Once More” (WTJ, Spring 2002) by Michael W. Payne (on reserve) (read by end of March)

“The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology” by Kevin J. Vanhoozer (on reserve). (read by end of April)

“Faith and Criticism” by Basil Mitchell (6 pages) (read by end of March)

Assessment/Grades:

1. The student will write a 5 page reflection on the Polanyi tapes in terms of the implications Polanyi’s ideas might have for apologetic argument. [15%] [March 3]

2. The student will write a paper (10 pages) on the central argument as proposed by Wainwright in his book Reason and the Heart. The title: ‘Reason: Simple Idea or not?’[30%] [March 20]

3. The student will write a 10 page paper on any one chapter in Reason for the Hope Within. [March 31] [25%]

4. Using the following topic: ‘Foundationalism: What is it and Why are People saying such nasty things about it?’—write a 10 page paper engaging with Wolterstorff’s book (see above) on this topic. [April 14th] [30%]