Course Description

A study of soteriology (the application of Christ’s work of redemption: union with Christ, calling, regeneration, conversion, faith, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification and perseverance) and sacraments (baptism, Lord’s Supper).

Prerequisites

MFT students are asked to pre-read Louis Berkhof’s Manual of Christian Doctrine (Eerdmans, 2002 [1933]).

Course Objectives

The principal aim of the Systematic courses (1ST508, 1ST512, and 1ST518-C) is to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the main doctrines of Christianity. This course aims at introducing the student to the last three of the loci of systematic theology: soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. 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]

“Thereology 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).

Required Texts

John Murray, Redemption: Accomplished and Applied (RAA), 79-181 (102 pages)
Wright, David F. Baptism: Three Views (IVP Academic) (B) (192 pp)

Reading Schedule:

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I. Class Attendance

Class attendance will be imperative for successful completion of this course.

The Instructor respectfully requests that students do not engage in private use of the on-line Internet facility during class hours.

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

II. Evaluation
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.

A. Reading Quiz (30%)

There will be ten quizzes based on the scheduled reading assignments. These will take place on Thursdays at 8.15am.

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 5 major doctrinal topics: Union with Christ; Justification; Sanctification; Baptism; and The Lord’s Supper.

1. Union with Christ
2. Justification
3. Sanctification
4. Baptism
5. The Lord’s Supper

You will be penalized for avoidable late submissions

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 OR Paper (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.