

THM SEMINAR

DIVINE ACCOMMODATION IN THE CHURCH AND IN CALVIN

2HT836
January 2009

PROFESSOR: Dr Jon Balsarak
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DATES: 12-16 January 2009
Seminars 9-noon
Tutorials 1-3 pm

PLACE: RTS Seminar Room

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class examines an idea which is at once devotionally edifying and theologically challenging. The notion of divine accommodation asserts that God must alter the way he interacts with us in order to suit our limited capacity. While it is most commonly discussed in relation to the doctrine of Scripture (i.e. God describes himself as having an arm, eyes, and wings in accommodation to our limited understanding) it applies to other arenas as well. As a concept, it has been the property of the Christian church since its inception, being employed by church fathers like Chrysostom and Augustine, medieval theologians like Peter Comestor and Aquinas, reformers such as Calvin and Peter Martyr Vermigli, and more modern thinkers, like Klaus Schilder. But before all of these, Jesus made use of it (see Matt 19: 8). This class will explore the contours and depth of divine accommodation, with particular attention being paid to Calvin's usage of it. It will look at accommodation's varied functions (exegetical, theological and polemical) and also explore the ways it influences our thinking on a range of subjects—God and his nature, human capacity, the effects of sin, and the character of Scripture.

COURSE READING (to be read before the seminar begins)

Primary literature

Calvin, John. Commentary on Genesis (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society; 1843-56; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker book house, 1979)—please read Calvin's treatment of the first ten chapters; so up through to page 321.

Secondary literature

Balserak, Jon. *Divinity Compromised; A Study of Divine Accommodation in the Thought of John Calvin* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2006).

Battles, Ford Lewis. 'God was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity,' in *Interpretation* 31 (1977), 19-38. Available in: *Interpreting John Calvin*, ed. Robert Benedetto (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 117-138.

Bouwtsma, William. 'Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing' in *Calvin Theological Journal* 17 (1982), 190-211. Available in: *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*, vol VII, The Organizational Structure of Calvin's Theology, ed. Richard Gamble (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 226-247.

Bouwtsma, William. 'Calvinism as *Theologia rhetorica*' in *Calvinism as Theologia rhetorica: protocol of the fifty-fourth colloquy, 28 September 1986*, ed. Wilhelm Wuellner (Berkeley, CA: the Center for Hermeneutical Studies at the University of California at Berkeley, 1986), 1-21. Available in: *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*, vol VII, The Organizational Structure of Calvin's Theology, ed. Richard Gamble (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 85-105.

Dowey, Edward J., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 3-17.

Oberman, Heiko. 'The "Extra" Dimension in the Theology of John Calvin' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 70 (1970), 43-64. Available in: *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 234-258.

Willis, E. David. 'Rhetoric and Responsibility in Calvin's Theology.' in: *The Context of Contemporary Theology: Essays in Honor of Paul Lehmann*, Hrsg. A.J. McKelway and E. David Willis (Atlanta: John Knox, 1974), 43-63.

Wright, David F., 'Calvin's Pentateuchal Criticism: Equity, Hardness of Heart, and Divine Accommodation in the Mosaic Harmony Commentary,' in: *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986), 33-50.

Additional Optional Reading

Balsarak, Jon. "The Accommodating Act Par Excellence?" an Inquiry into the Incarnation and Calvin's Understanding of Accommodation' in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55 (2002), 379-394.

Benin, Stephen. *The Footprints of God; Divine Accommodation in Jewish and Christian Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

Benin, Stephen. 'Sacrifice as Education in Augustine and Chrysostom' in *Church History* 52 (1983), 7-20.

Benin, Stephen . 'The "Cunning of God" and Divine Accommodation' in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (1984), 179-191.

Bouwsma, William. *John Calvin; A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 113-127.

Forstman, H. Jackson. *Word and Spirit: Calvin's Doctrine of Biblical Authority* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

Gerrish, Brian. "To the Unknown God: Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God," *Journal of Religion* 53 (1973): 263-292

Helm, Paul. 'Divine Accommodation' in *John Calvin's Ideas* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 184-208.

Wright, David F., "Calvin's Accommodating God" in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex*, eds Neuser and Armstrong (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Pub, 1997), 3-19

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be one research paper (20+ pages) on a topic which I must approve. I am happy to give you suggestions but would like the idea to be your own. The complete first draft is due March 20, 2009. The final draft of the research paper is due April 24, 2009. I am happy to look at drafts of your paper at any time, and trust that you will be able to manage yourselves sufficiently to complete the paper and get it to me by 24 April.

There are also two response papers (5-7 pages) on the reading assignments, which are to be completed before the January session.

The research paper is 80% of the final grade. Each response paper will be 10% of the final grade.

There will be no assigned presentations by the students in class. That being said, discussion during the lectures will be expected to be full and lively. In afternoon tutorials, I will work with students to help (i) to assess and develop scholarly skills and (ii) to begin work on the research paper.

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

12 January — Introduction to Calvin; Divine Accommodation in exegesis and theology

13 January — Divine accommodation and the economy of salvation

14 January — Ethical accommodation 1

15 January — Ethical accommodation 2

16 January — Divine Accommodation and the contours of Calvin's theology

POST-SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Week of 19 January	Travel Week
Week of 26 January	3-5 page draft to Professor
Week of 2 February	Professor responds to Student Papers
Week of 9 February	5-7 pages to Professor
Week of 16 February	Professor responds to Student Papers
Week of 23 February	10-13 pages to Professor
<i>Nota Bene:</i> Each student should also send a copy of this draft to all seminar participants for feedback	
Week of 2 March	All Seminar participants provide feedback for Student Paper.
Week of 9 March	First Draft to Professor
<i>Nota Bene:</i> Each student should also send a copy of this draft to all seminar participants for feedback	
Week of 16 March	All Seminar participants provide feedback for Student

	Paper.
Week of 23 March	Final Draft due to Professor.
FINAL DRAFT DUE 27 MARCH 2009	

Nota Bene: All preliminary and final drafts will be via email. Submit each by the due date to Professor Balserak at: Balserak@hotmail.com

GRADING SCALE

97-100	A
94-96	A-
91-93	B+
88-90	B
86-87	B-
83-85	C+
80-82	C
78-79	C-
75-77	D+
72-74	D
70-71	D-
0-69	F

Criteria for Evaluation of THM Papers

I. Grammar and Style (25%)

- * Is the text clean of spelling mistakes?
- * Is the text punctuated correctly?
- * Does the sentence structure consistently adhere to basic rules of good grammar?
- * Does the footnote/bibliographic apparatus follow Turabian consistently? (Turabian, A Manual for Writers).
- * Is the paper written in clear, straight-forward style of academic prose (e.g., the guidelines in Strunk and White, The Elements of Style)?

II. Organization (25%)

- * Is the subject of the paper clearly delimited? Is it significant, but still manageable?
- * Does the subject correspond to what was assigned in the syllabus?
- * Does the paper have a well-designed thesis statement and outline?
- * Does the running text of the paper adhere to the outline, and are the larger divisions of the paper clearly signposted?
- * Are the sentences and paragraphs of the text linked together clearly and in such a way that the thought of the student builds throughout the paper with continuity and coherence?

III. Clarity and Force of Argument (25%)

- * Is a convincing case made to support the thesis statement?
- * Is the evidence marshalled to support the argument used judiciously?
- * Where the student provides exposition or summary, does she/he do so succinctly and objectively?
- * Are opposing viewpoints treated fairly?
- * Is there evidence of mature Christian reflection on the subject matter?

IV. Research (25%)

- * Does the paper draw on primary sources for its main evidence?
- * Are the secondary sources selected and used judiciously?
- * Does the paper demonstrate sufficient depth and breadth of research, given the nature and level of the assignment?

Recommended Resources

Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, The Modern Researcher (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, latest edition).

Mary-Claire van Leunen, A Handbook for Scholars (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).

William Zinsser, On Writing Well (New York: Harper and Row, latest edition).