

PT 535 – Senior Seminar

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Please note: Because of the seminar structure of this course, students will be required to complete the assigned reading **before** the first class meeting. **During** the week of class, students will likely spend at least one evening with other class members in preparation for their in-class presentations.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course seeks to pull together the learning of the program by applying it to practical pastoral issues.

MEETING TIMES

June 14-18, Monday-Friday, 8:30 am – 3:30 pm

ASSIGNED READING

R. Michael Allen and Daniel J. Treier, “Dogmatic Theology and Biblical Perspectives on Justification: A Reply to Leithart” (available from professor)

Simon Gathercole, “The Gospel of Paul and the Gospel of the Kingdom,” in *God’s Power to Save: One gospel for a complex world?*, ed. Chris Green (available from professor)

Jason Hood, “Christ-Centred Interpretation Only? Moral Instruction from Scripture’s Self-Interpretation as Caveat and Guide” (available from professor)

James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (ISBN 13: 9780199730803)

Peter J. Leithart, “Justification as Verdict and Deliverance: A Biblical Perspective” (available from professor)

“The Sum of Saving Knowledge” (available:
<http://www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/documents/sum/sum.html>)

The Westminster Confession of Faith

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Reading report (30 %): On the first day of class, students will hand in a reading report stating the percentage of the assigned readings that they have completed by June 14, 2010.

2. Class presentations (40 %): Prior to the first class meeting, students will be assigned to a group that will be responsible for doing a class presentation on one of the topics listed below. Presentations will be graded according to the following criteria:

(a) **Substance:** Did the presentation display a clear understanding of the issue, rooted in significant research and reflection? Did it fairly represent all sides of the issue? Did it present a compelling case for a position on this issue that is “reformed according to the Word of God”?

(b) **Presentation:** Was the class presentation clear, interesting, and creative? Did the presentation engage class participation?

(c) **Payoff:** Did the presentation provide fellow classmates with a framework for thinking about/acting upon this issue as a Reformed pastor-theologian? Did the presentation introduce valuable resources that will aid further reflection upon this topic in the future?

3. Class participation (30 %): Students are expected to attend and to interact with all class presentations.

TOPICS FOR CLASS PRESENTATIONS

1. Adam as an Historical and/or Literary Figure

For the past five years you have served the presbytery committee which examines the theological views of candidates for the gospel ministry. Recently, the local seminary hired one of your former classmates to teach Hebrew and Old Testament. Though you did not know him well in seminary days, you always considered him a nice fellow and had no reason to think anything but the best of him. He is now seeking ordination in your presbytery and you, along with the rest of the examining committee, are charged with examining his theological views.

In the course of his examinations, he discloses that he does not believe Adam was an historical figure. To be sure, he argues, Adam is important for biblical theology—Adam

represents “everyman” in his sinful rebellion against God, and Adam functions as a literary type of historical Israel. However, genre considerations have led him to conclude that Adam never existed in history, and certainly not as the single father of all humanity.

Because this candidate for ordination believes in biblical inspiration and inerrancy, and because he cites several leading Reformed Old Testament scholars who agree with him on this matter, the committee is not quite sure what to do. Because you’re the most recent seminary grad on the committee, you’ve been asked to speak to the issue of Adam’s historicity *and* to suggest whether or not your former classmate’s view is consistent with the doctrinal standards of your denomination (the Westminster Standards in this case).

2. The Doctrine Upon which the Church Stands or Falls

According to Martin Luther, the doctrine of justification by faith alone is “the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls.” Recently, however, several leading Protestant thinkers have suggested that Luther may be wrong, and that on two counts. For one thing, they argue, it is difficult to see why the doctrine of justification should be considered more “foundational” than any other doctrine. For another thing, it is unclear whether Luther’s understanding of justification was actually the same as *Paul’s*.

The issue has become a pressing one for you. The senior pastor at the local PCA church, where you also serve as an associate pastor, recently preached a series of sermons suggesting that the Protestant doctrine of justification, including the form espoused in the Westminster Confession of Faith, is too one-sided in its emphasis. Though this sounded a bit fishy to you, you also respect your senior pastor very much as a scholar and mentor. Consequently, you decided to do a little reading on your own before you broach the topic with him. You believe you owe him—and his arguments—that sort of respect.

Having read up on the matter (including articles by Leithart, Allen and Treier, as well as the PCA and OPC committee reports on justification), you’re now ready to talk through this issue with your senior pastor. You realize that his (and your) viewpoint may have serious consequences for your ministries, including whether or not you can stay in the PCA.

3. Teaching and Preaching Christ in all of Scripture

You grew up in a solid, Bible-believing church, where you learned a great deal from your pastors and teachers. However, as you matured in your faith, and eventually entered into the ministry, you came to the conclusion that much of what you heard growing up from pulpit and lectern amounted to “moralizing.” Under the influence of the writings and sermons of Bryan Chapell, Tim Keller, and others, you have sought to develop a more “Christ-centered” approach in your own preaching and teaching ministry.

The other day, you overheard a couple of congregants talking about your sermons in the hallway of the church. Their words were both kind and respectful. At the end of their

conversation, one of them joked: “Yeah, and you always know what the topic of his sermon will be: Christ obeyed, therefore you don’t have to.” Your first response was shock—How could your sermons be so easily misunderstood? You’re not advocating moral indifference. Upon further reflection, however, you began to wonder if you indeed had been guilty of feeding the flock a limited diet. Had you become the pastoral equivalent of a “one hit wonder”?

As you discussed this matter with a close friend and fellow minister, he suggested that you read a recent article by Jason Hood entitled, “Christ-Centred Interpretation Only? Moral Instruction from Scripture's Self-Interpretation as Caveat and Guide.” While you found this article very thought-provoking and challenging, you’re not sure what to make of his arguments. You still believe that the gospel should lie at the center of a pastor’s preaching and teaching ministry—that the gospel is a matter of “first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3). But you wonder if you’ve been guilty of reducing the gospel to only one of its themes. All of this is causing you to consider once again the question: “What does it mean to have a Christ-centered, gospel-centered teaching and preaching ministry?” “What does it mean to teach and preach Christ in all of Scripture?”

4. Means of Grace Church Plant

Your very (theologically) conservative and very (liturgically) traditional Reformed church is interested in planting a church near a major university. They’ve asked you to be involved. One of your duties involves coming up with a “vision” for the ministry of this new church plant—and selling this vision to the sending church’s session.

For deeply biblical-theological reasons, you are personally committed to a “means of grace” ministry—i.e., the ministry of the Word, the sacraments, and prayer, and remain unimpressed by various church growth, emergent, and third-way alternatives. However, you also realize that the university community is quite different—socially, economically, culturally—from the traditional Reformed church that is sending you to plant. Consequently, you’re not sure exactly what a “means of grace” church would or should look like in a university setting. Do you insist that ministers wear Geneva gowns (as your home church does)? What about weekly communion? Hymns? RUF tunes? Etc.

Because you could care less about being “hip,” and because you care everything about honoring the Lord and trusting him to bless the ministry that he has ordained, your question is: “What would a means of grace ministry look like in your university setting?” Answering this question for your sending church’s session requires that you: (1) Define and defend exactly what a “means of grace” ministry is; (2) explain what practices would be “non-negotiable” and what practices would be “negotiable” in this new church plant; and (3) explain how you will render prudential judgments (cf. WCF 1.6) about including/excluding practices that you deem “negotiable.”

5. Swimming the Tiber

One of your best friends from seminary called the other day and said she's seriously considering converting to Roman Catholicism. She is highly dissatisfied with evangelicalism (for all the usual reasons: the seemingly hopeless divisions of Protestantism, trite public worship, drift toward heterodoxy, etc.) and is increasingly persuaded that the Roman Catholic Church is *the* one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Moreover, she argues, most of the biggest concerns that led Luther, Calvin, etc. out of the Roman Catholic Church are no longer a point of theological disagreement in light of recent initiatives (e.g., *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church; various documents of "Evangelicals and Catholics Together"; the "New Perspective on Paul"; etc.). She therefore can see no reason for remaining outside of Mother Church.

Nevertheless, out of a desire to be intellectually and spiritually honest, she has decided to think and pray about the matter for six months before making her final decision. She's asked you to be a part of this process, not only by joining her in prayer, but also by *providing her with the most sympathetic and yet persuasive arguments you can think of against "swimming the Tiber."* She realizes that she may have blind spots on this issue and respects your judgment. You realize that the usual caricatures of Roman Catholicism may not apply and that you cannot simply rely upon 16th century arguments against the Roman Catholic Church.

6. Gospel and Culture

You serve a church that is committed to the vision of "transforming Orlando: spiritually, culturally, and socially." You have just read James Davison Hunter's, *To Change the World*, however, and are feeling some (still undefined) ambivalence about this vision statement. Word about your ambivalence has reached some of the other leaders at your church and they have asked you to interact with the church's vision statement in light of your recent reading. Specifically, they want you to address questions such as: Is the church called to transform the world? If so, how so? In light of your answer to these questions, What is the role of the minister of the gospel (i.e., pastor) in this process? And how should the church's ministries and monies be organized?