Course Description

A study of **Christology**, **soteriology** (the application of Christ’s work of redemption: union with Christ, calling, regeneration, conversion, faith, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification and perseverance), and **eschatology** (death, intermediate state, the return of Christ, resurrection and final judgment), with reference to historical theology. We will attempt to outline 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.

Prerequisites

Students who are unfamiliar with the discipline of Systematic Theology should consult the following:


Course Objectives

The principal aim of the Systematic Theology courses 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: Christology, soteriology, 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:

“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, Alexander 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). Students are welcome to email questions to me (dthomas@rts.edu).

Course Requirements

I. Required Texts (See, MindandHeart.com for specific details)

John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion
Herman Bavinck Reformed Dogmatics Abridged in one volume
A. Hoekema, The Bible and the Future
John Murray, Redemption: Accomplished and Applied
Donald MacLeod, The Person of Christ
N. T. Wright, Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision
Steve Jeffrey, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, Pierced for our Transgression
The Westminster Confession of Faith
II. Required Reading schedule

A sample quiz with answers will be posted online for quiz No. 1.

III. 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 online Internet facility during class hours. E-mailing during class is frowned upon.*

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

IV. Evaluation

A. Reading Quizzes (20%)

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:

1. Christological Heresies of the Person of Christ
2. Views of the Atonement
3. Justification
4. Sanctification
5. Millennial positions

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 (60%)

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 be lengthy, requiring detailed knowledge. This exam will be sent to a proctor. Details of how this is to be done will be given during class time.
Extension Policy

All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class.

Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.

Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an Extension Request Form from the Student Services Office. The request must be approved by the Professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed. (RTS Catalog p. 42 and RTS Atlanta Student Handbook p. 14)

Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by request. (RTS Catalog p. 42)
Précis sample

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 2:19-22, 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
### Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Articulation</strong> (oral &amp; written)</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Students are expected to become articulate in articulating and defending major points of doctrine.</td>
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<td>Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.</td>
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<td><strong>Scripture</strong></td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Scriptural justification is required for the doctrinal concepts articulated in this course. Students are expected to engage in exegetical studies.</td>
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<td>Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)</td>
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<td><strong>Reformed Theology</strong></td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>This course examines the issues raised by reformed Theology.</td>
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<td>Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.</td>
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<td><strong>Sanctification</strong></td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>All truth is in order to godliness.</td>
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<td>Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student’s sanctification.</td>
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<td><strong>Desire for Worldview</strong></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Students are expected to think of ways the doctrines explored form a worldview.</td>
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<td>Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.</td>
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<td><strong>Winsomely Reformed</strong></td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Students are urged to defend their doctrinal positions winsomely.</td>
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<td>Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)</td>
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<td><strong>Preach</strong></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Frequent analysis of how doctrine should/can be</td>
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<td>Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.</td>
<td>Strong</td>
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<td><strong>Worship</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Shepherd</strong></td>
<td>Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both in America and worldwide.</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Church/World</strong></td>
<td>Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
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Reading Quizzes

#1 Calvin Book 2, Chapters 12 – 17

#2 Bavinck IV; McLeod Chapters 1-5

#3 McLeod Chapters 6-10; Jeffrey/Ovey/Sachs Part 1

#4 Jeffrey/Ovey/Sachs Part 2; Murray Part 1

#5 Calvin Book 3, Chapters 1 – 18

#6 N T Wright

#7 Murray Part 2; Bavinck Part V

#8 Hoekema Chapters 1-6

#9 Hoekema Chapters 7-13

#10 Hoekema Chapters 14-20