Course Description

A study of ecclesiology and sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper)

Prerequisites

Students who are wondering as to the value of Systematic Theology to preaching 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. 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 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]

“Theology 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 should read the 4-volumed work by 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).

Course Requirements

I. READING

   Required Texts

   Careful reading is required of the following materials:

   Westminster Confession of Faith (25-31)
   Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*
   David Wright (Ed.), *Baptist: Three Views*
   Guy Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church?*
   Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (One Volume)
   Robert Letham, *The Lord’s Supper: Eternal Word in Broken Bread*
Weekly Quizzes

There are 3 reading quizzes that will be done at the beginning of each class period. These quizzes will take no longer than 10 minutes and will consist of three or four basic questions designed to show that the student is familiar with that week’s reading. **Note that the first quiz is due on the first day of class.**

Session 1 (Jan 11-12): Dulles, Waters,

Session 2 (Jan 18-19): Calvin, Bavinck (589-692; OR in the Four volume edition, 273-588)

Session 3 (Feb 15-16): Letham, Wright

II. Evaluation

The course will be divided into three unequal parts: Quizzes (30%), Term Paper (30%), and a final examination (40%).

a. Quizzes (30%)

b. Term Paper (30%) – to be written on one of the following topics:
   i. Baptism
   ii. The Lord’s Supper

c. Final Exam (40%)

   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.

III. 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)

IV. Contact: Should you need to contact me, dthomas@rts.edu
### Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

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<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Articulation</strong></td>
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<td>(oral &amp; written)</td>
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<tr>
<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>
<td>STRONG</td>
<td>Expertise in theological formulation is a requirement</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scripture</strong></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>
<td>STRONG</td>
<td>All doctrinal formulations must be the product of accurate exegesis of Scripture</td>
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<td><strong>Reformed Theology</strong></td>
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<td>Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.</td>
<td>STRONG</td>
<td>The course consists in a study of Reformed Theology</td>
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<td><strong>Sanctification</strong></td>
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<td>Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student’s sanctification.</td>
<td>STRONG</td>
<td>Truth/Doctrine is on order to godliness</td>
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<td><strong>Desire for Worldview</strong></td>
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<td>Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.</td>
<td>STRONG</td>
<td>Reformed Theology has given considerable emphasis to the impact of theology on the whole of life</td>
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<td><strong>Winsomely Reformed</strong></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>
<td>STRONG</td>
<td>The course will encourage winsome debate and disagreement</td>
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<td><strong>Preach</strong></td>
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<td>Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.</td>
<td>STRONG</td>
<td>The Professor is only interested in theology that can be preached</td>
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*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.*
| **Worship** | Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service. | STRONG | Theology rests in doxology |
| **Shepherd** | 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. | STRONG | Good theology enables good pastoral skills |
| **Church/World** | Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues. | STRONG | Particular attention is given to ecclesiastical bias in doctrinal formulation |