Introduction to Apologetics (2 Credit Hours)
Professor: Payne
Spring 2005
Reformed Theological Seminary
Jackson, Mississippi

Course Syllabus

This course is designed to introduce the student to the theory and practice of apologetics from a Reformed perspective. In an age of increasing disillusionment concerning any commitments to absolutes other than for purely psychological reasons, the church (believers) faces challenges that cut to the heart of our Christian convictions. The course is specifically designed to address the issues raised by postmodernism.

*Postmodern Age:* This is the age of normal nihilism (Nietzsche), an age in which there can be no truth but only interpretation.

How are we in fact to do apologetics in such an era? In this course we will demonstrate how Reformed Theology provides the framework out of which apologetics is to be conceptualized and practiced. Above all, the inerrant Word of God and its testimony concerning the Son of God (Jesus Christ) will be our starting point for engagement with the world.

Course Goals and Objectives:

1. The student will be familiar with the cultural and philosophical milieu of contemporary Western Society as it impacts our practice of apologetics.
2. The student will be reminded of the importance of a Reformed perspective on and the apologetic implications flowing from: a) The Doctrine of God, b) The Doctrine of Man, c) The Doctrine of Scripture, and e) The Doctrine of the Church.
3. The student will be better equipped to engage in evangelistic conversation with an apologetic character.

Course Readings: Books and Articles

*Christian Apologetics* (2nd Edition) Cornelius Van Til (edited by Bill Edgar) (read in entirety by end of March)
*Unapologetic Theology* by William Placher (read in entirety by end of February)
*Tacit Knowing* (Mars Hill Audio Series on the thought of Michael Polanyi)
*Reason and the Heart* by William J. Wainwright (Cornell University Press) (read in entirety by end of March)

“Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Corinthians 2: 6-16” (*WTJ*) by Richard B. Gaffin (on reserve) (read by end of March)
“Why We Can’t All Just Get Along” and “Faith Before Reason” by Stanley Fish (First Things) (on reserve)
“Why We Can Get Along” by Richard John Neuhaus (First Things) (on reserve)
“Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narratives and Apologetics: The Ad hominem Once More” (WTJ, Spring 2002) by Michael W. Payne (on reserve) (read by end of March)
“The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology” by Kevin J. Vanhoozer (on reserve). (read by end of April)
“Faith and Criticism” by Basil Mitchell (6 pages) (read by end of March)

Assessment/Grades:

1. The student will write a 5 page reflection on the Polanyi tapes in terms of the implications Polanyi’s ideas might have for apologetic argument. [15%] [March 3]
2. The student will write a 6-8 page reflection on the Fish/Neuhaus discussion in First Things. [25%] [March 31]
3. The student will write a paper (10 pages) on the central argument as proposed by Wainwright in his book Reason and the Heart. [30%] [April 15]
4. The student will write a 6-8 page reflection on an interview he or she has with a non-Christian during the semester answering the question: ‘Why am I not a Christian?’ [It is assumed that students in seminary are regularly coming into contact with unbelievers.] In your regular conversations with non-Christians ask one to let you interview them in order to better understand why they have chosen not to follow Christ. Everyone who has done this exercise in the past has been blessed by the experience. You can tape it (if allowable to the person interviewed) or just take notes or whatever works for you. I am not interested necessarily in a verbatim record of the conversation, although if you can provide parts of one that will be great. I am interested in your outlining with some degree of accuracy what arguments/reasons an unbeliever offers concerning their unwillingness to follow Christ. Suggestion: Some of my students have invited a non-Christian friend to see a thought-provoking movie together and then follow it up with a discussion over coffee. [Note: in your final version, don’t use the person’s real name! You can (should) change the gender just in case.] Some have called old college friends who are not Christians and have interviewed them over the phone. Be creative. [30% of your final grade] [April 29]