TH 607 SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY III

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston Campus/CUME, Fall 2011
Rev. Dr. William David Spencer and Athanasius Scholars.

Course Description:
According to the CUME catalog: "Class sessions and readings emphasize the theologies of God's grace and the application of the atonement, the nature and functioning of the Church, the role of Scripture in Christian life, the return of Christ, and the final judgment."

According to the Hamilton catalog: "A study of conversion, justification, sanctification, perseverance, the work of the Holy Spirit, church, sacraments, and eschatology."

This course will address both sets of issues.

Measurable goals that address the “Statement of Mission” include 2 paper assignments that “encourage students to become knowledgeable in God’s inerrant word and competent in its interpretation” (Article #1). Assignment #1 requires students to test 2 competing theological systems against Scripture, present a particular view in each system fairly and assess the accuracy of both views’ interpretations of Scripture, choosing one and explaining why the student believes that one is preferable (without demonizing the other view). Assignment #2 asks students to formulate a personal theology based on Scripture and all they have learned in their seminary studies. The papers are assessed by the staff and returned for redoing with comments for improvement and the guiding cover sheet completed that together help each student master the course content (Article #2). Assignment #1 and class exercises in doing theology help students apply what they are learning practically to ministry (Article #3). Class #1 on the personal significance of the application of God’s grace in the Atonement and subsequent sanctification, as well as classes on the work of the Holy Spirit and the place of the sacraments in the life of the believer apply the material to the growth of each student’s personal and communal life of faith (Article #4). The class on the church and the requirement in Assignment #1 to assess fairly other theologies that might disagree with a student’s own views help each develop a wider worldview (Article #5). These two specific aspects along with the lecture on the global significance of the Atonement are also designed to assist students in developing a local and global praxis to accompany their theology.

Required Textbooks: according to their appearance in the syllabus:
1. Aída Besançon Spencer and William David Spencer, *Joy through the Night: Biblical Resources on Suffering*  

2. Alister McGrath, ed., *The Christian Theology Reader*  

3. Choose one: Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*  
   OR  
   John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*  
   OR  
   H. Orton Wiley, *Introduction to Christian Theology*  

   (ISBN: 10 0-87784-794-0; 13 978-0-87784-794-6)

5. World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*  
   OR  
   Gordon Smith, ed., *The Lord’s Supper: Five Views*  
   (ISBN: 978-0-8308-2884-5)  
   OR  
   David F. Wright, ed., *Baptism: Three Views*  
   (ISBN: 978-0-8308-3856-1)

   (ISBN: 10 0-8308-2570-3; 13 978-0-8308-2570-7)

   OR  
   James Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*  

8. Aída Dina Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*  
   (ISBN: 10 0801047749; 13 978-0801047749)

**Required Writing Assignments:**

Students will complete 2 paper assignments, as outlined in this syllabus.

**Grading:**

Each paper will comprise 50% of your grade.

Since reading is imperative for understanding these complex theological perspectives, your grade will raise or lower according to how faithful you have been in reading all the assignments.

Students are expected to use the theological hermeneutic developed (interpreting from the biblically revealed nature of God) with
reference to all the information gleaned in all three theology classes to analyze all the materials in this course against the historic orthodox position of the Bible and the creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon.

TH607 SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY III:

CLASS OVERVIEW

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, CLASS 1, 6:00 to 10:00 p.m.


Recommended Reading: If you are just joining us, have taken several semesters break from studying Systematic Theology, or have not taken Theology 2 with Dr. Spencer, you may want to refresh yourself further on these topics by reading Dieter, et. al., FIVE VIEWS OF SANCTIFICATION, Calvin, INSTITUTES, Book 3: Chapters. 20-25, "Prayer" - "Final Resurrection"; Arminius, THE WORKS OF ARMINIUS, volume 1: "Declaration of Sentiments," "On Predestination," "The Justification of Man."

Topic: APPLYING THE NATURE AND WORK OF GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT APOLOGETICALLY TO OUR CURRENT AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS BY DEVELOPING A THEODICY.

REVIEW OF SYLLABUS.

REQUIRED READING:
On theology: Spencer & Spencer, JOY THROUGH THE NIGHT: BIBLICAL RESOURCES FOR SUFFERING PEOPLE; on Eschatology: McGrath, Reader: 610-647: Erickson, Part 12, Chaps 56-60; or Calvin, Book 3, Chap. 20, sect. 42; Wiley, Unit 7, Chaps. 21-22, Clouse, MEANING OF MILLENNIUM, FOUR VIEWS.

REQUIRED WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 due third class for those wishing the option to redo.
NOVEMBER 15, CLASS 2

Topic: ESCHATOLOGY: The Eschaton as God's answer to the Theodicy Question (with special attention to I Thess 4:13; I Cor 15:30-33; Matt 25:31-46; Rev. 6:9-10). The historic positions on eschatology. What can we know? The role of eschatology in contemporary ministry.

Topic: THE ATONEMENT: Classic and current debates on the nature and significance of the Atonement, including why this issue is important for global Christians.


Recommended Reading:

REQUIRED WRITING ASSIGNMENT #2 due next class for those wishing the option to redo.

NOVEMBER 22, CLASS 3

Topic: THE ATONEMENT (CONTINUED)
THE DOCTRINE AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE SACRAMENTS. Special attention will also be given to the Holy Spirit's personality and full and equal place in the Godhead; the work of the Spirit in regeneration and sanctification of believers, in providing testimony to the Word and empowerment to the Church, the gifting of the Spirit for the edification of the Church, and the Spirit's continuing ministry to Christians through facilitating prayer and illuminating and applying the Bible as a believer's ultimate rule for faith and practice. Particular attention will also be paid to how the Holy Spirit ministers to Christians collectively through the Sacraments (with specific attention to the various views of the nature and function of the sacraments).
REQUIRED READING: Erickson, CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, Part 9: Chapters 41-42; or Calvin, INSTITUTES, Book 1: Chaps. 7, 12; or Wiley, INTRODUCTION, Unit 2: Chap. 7, Unit 5: Chap. 14; W.C.C., BAPTISM, EUCHARIST AND MINISTRY or Smith, THE LORD’S SUPPER, or Wright, BAPTISM.


November 29, Class 4

Topic: IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY TO SALVATION? We live in a pluralistic age in which traditional Christian claims of salvation through Christ alone are being questioned both outside as well as inside the conservative church. This class will review classic exclusivist statements by Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Manton, Bruce Demarest. Representative challenges to the six historic evangelical positions regarding the lost by John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Paul Knitter, Karl Rahner, John Cobb, Jr., John Sanders, Clark Pinnock will then be examined.

Topic: THE CHURCH: The Doctrine and Work of the Church, including the Biblical Theology of the Church (tracing its calling from a land-based people of God to an international body of Christ). The organizational structure and distribution of power within the various expressions of the Church will also be examined. Theological Issues in the Contemporary Church (modern to post-modern) will include the current rise of the "Emerging Church" and its development within post-modern theology, as well as the nature, functions, and challenges to ethnic ecclesiology in an increasingly multicultural world.

REQUIRED READING: McGrath, CHRISTIAN READER, Section 7 (The Church): 7.1-7.28; Erickson, Part 11: Chaps 50-55; or Calvin, Book 4: Chaps 1-12; or Wiley, Unit 6: Chaps 19-20. The Spencers and Haddad, GLOBAL VOICES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY (with special attention to chapters 3-6); or Cone, FOR MY PEOPLE, BLACK THEOLOGY AND THE BLACK CHURCH.

Recommended Reading: Marva J. Dawn, Truly the Community: Romans 12 and How to be the Church. Gilbert Bilezikian, Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness. On baptism, compare readings in Erickson, Part 11, Chapt. 53 with Donald Bridge & David Phypers, The Water that Divides: The Baptism
Debate, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Children of Promise: The Case for Baptizing Infants.

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 5, Individual Meetings, CLASS 5**

Non-required individual Student Conference Meetings will be held at the CUME building, 90 Warren Street, Roxbury. Please consult the sign up sheet distributed in classes #3 and #4 to choose an available time slot. Students from Hamilton and those traveling a distance may meet with Dr. Spencer from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. in Aida Spencer’s office in the basement of the library in Hamilton.

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, CLASS 6**

Topic: THE ROLE AND CHALLENGE OF ETHNIC AND OTHER THEOLOGIES IN THE CHURCH.

Test Case #1: Black Theology Challenges the Church (with special reference to James Cone’s FOR MY PEOPLE, BLACK THEOLOGY AND THE BLACK CHURCH).

Test Case #2: The Impact of Context on Evangelical Theology: The Case of Haiti: Does the Vodou Jesus as loa affect the Evangelical Proclamation of Jesus the Christ’s person and work?

Test Case #3: Is Asian Theology a Whole New Understanding or a Return to the Faith Once Given to the Saints? Eastern Christianity as a “Corrective” for Western Religion: What Are the Benefits? Are There Any Detriments?

REQUIRED READING: Aída Besançon Spencer, BEYOND THE CURSE (to discuss in class); McGrath, READER on the Feminist perspectives: 112-113, 75-80, 130-131, 169-170, 171-173, 251-257.

DECEMBER 13, CLASS 7

5:00 pm Celebration Dinner in the CUME student lounge (pot providence (each of us brings a part to share). Class begins at usual time: 6:00 pm.

TOPIC: ETHNIC AND PARTICULAR THEOLOGIES IN THE CHURCH, continued.

Test Case #2, Hispanic/Latina Theology; Feminist, Womanist, and Egalitarian Theology: What are their concerns? (With special reference to Aída Besançon Spencer's BEYOND THE CURSE: WOMEN CALLED TO MINISTRY).

TOPIC: SUMMARY OF COURSE

All papers are due to be handed in during this class.

May God bless all of you and enlighten many through your informed, faithful, accurate, steadfast, pastoral, sensitive, loving and bold proclamation of the faith once delivered to the saints.

REQUIRED WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1:

Due third class for those wishing the option to rewrite with corrections.

Please note: all submissions and redoings must be accompanied by the corrected previous draft and cover sheet. Those not wishing to redo may submit the paper at the sixth class session. Automatic grace period: last class.

Write a 5 page paper on ONE of the following assignments:

Assignment IA: The Church has divided over countless theological issues. But, theology can help us understand and appreciate different views. Pick one of the following topics. Summarize the debate (two pages) and then explain your position (two pages). Include an introduction and thesis (one half page) and a summary and conclusion with notes (1 half page). Be sure to provide adequate biblical support. Use primary source quotations to present both sides fairly. Tell which side is more convincing to you biblically and theologically. Discuss your views calmly and without polemics. Choices include:

* Infant Baptism vs. Believers' Baptism (PLEASE NOTE: Those selecting this option would be wise to compare Erickson's argument in Part 11, Chapt. 53 with Donald Bridge and David Phypers, THE WATER THAT DIVIDES or Geoffrey Bromiley, CHILDREN OF PROMISE.
* The Lord's Supper: Compare the positions of Zwingli, Calvin, Luther
* Women's Ordination (warning: present both sides and their scriptural arguments fairly)
* Social Justice and Evangelism
* Gifts of the Holy Spirit
* Church structure: which option is most biblically and theologically correct?

OR

Assignment 1B: Using a document (Confession or Statement of Faith) from your denomination or a potential denomination you are considering, write a five (5) page paper showing how a particular key doctrinal concept/statement is derived from Scripture and show how it applies to some specific issue in the Church today.
* Quote the statement.
* Analyze its main point.
* Identify its scriptural basis (and tell us if you feel the Scripture is being interpreted accurately).
* Explain what issue in the Church historically this statement was (or still is) addressing.
* Show how the statement is applied to the issue, evaluating its effectiveness. (This is one form of doing theology.)
* Finally, decide: is its principle still of contemporary relevance? If so, how? If not, why not?

OR

Assignment 1C: Analyze any theologian discussed or any book required or recommended in this course (or in our previous Systematic Theology I or II).

1. Report (do not evaluate yet): what is the content, approach, methodology? What are the motivating concerns?
2. What is the Best: what can be lifted out for Evangelicals?
3. What is the Rest: What is in error that we should discard?

Analyze the following facets:
* What is the view of God? Is it fully Trinitarian? Is the view of God similar to some view already present in Christian history? Is it orthodox or heretical?
* What is the view of Scripture? How authoritative is the Bible regarded to be? How does the author's view compare with the Bible's view? Give some specific examples.
* Is the view of Jesus historically orthodox or heterodox?
* What is the view of the atonement? Is the atonement sufficiently done by Christ or is something more needed?

Ask the following questions:
1. What are the author's concerns? What does the author care about? What is important to the author?
2. What is the personal historical context of the author as (s)he writes the book? Why did (s)he write the book? What was the point?
3. How does its view of God interpret its issue or concern?
4. What does the writer want the reader to do in response?
5. Do I agree with the author's view of God, theology, reading of the situation?
6. What are the author's primary sources? Were they correctly interpreted? Should they be primary sources?
7. Does the author use an image or illustration which is key to interpreting the author's thought?

REQUIRED WRITING ASSIGNMENT #2

Write one 8 page paper on your personal theology.

Draw from the following resources:

* Bible
* The Nicaean Creed and Chalcedonian Definition of the Faith
* At least one of the Systematic Theologies by Erickson, Calvin, or Wiley
* Your previous work in Systematics 1 and 2
* Theological writings in your own personal library and in the seminary libraries

Your writing must touch on the following topics:

* The Nature of God
* The Dual Nature of Christ – fully human, fully God
* The Personality of the Holy Spirit
* Your understanding of the Trinity – the One in Three
* Your view of Creation: How did God create? Through evolution or special creation? Please support your view from the Bible and scientific data.
* Your understanding of the fall (your Theodicy).
* Your definition of sin, grace, salvation, sanctification (including your view of which system is more correct in understanding God's salvific plan as described in Scripture: Calvin's or Arminius')?
* Your eschatological position.
* Your view of the Bible
* Your definition of the Church
* Your view of the responsibility of the Christian in the world (your view of individual and social ethics, evangelism, and apologetics. Please touch on all of these).

We will be checking for a responsible, documented, theologically orthodox position on each of these areas.

Due by the third class for those wishing the option to redo. Those not choosing this option may turn first drafts in in the 6th class. Please remember to include the assignment cover sheet with your initial paper submission.

All redoings must also be accompanied by the original draft and original cover sheet to be regraded.
Blessings.