TH 607 SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY III

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston Campus/CUME, Oct/Nov 2013, 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.

Course Objective: For students to form an intentional, orthodox, working theology which is crucial to the proper formation of doctrinal concepts, the promotion of personal spiritual growth, and the successful performance of ministry.

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 by an instructor 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 and #2 on the personal significance of the application of God’s grace in the Atonement and the development of a theodicy and its application to ministry among those who are suffering from illness, loss, or persecution help equip and guide students to apply the material to their personal and communal lives of faith (Article #4). Classes #4 through #6 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). Lectures on the global significance of the Atonement, the uniqueness of Christ and the Church are also designed to assist students in developing a local and global praxis to accompany their theology.
The course fulfills the various program degree goals in a number of ways. While it does not require knowledge of biblical languages, it does encourage students who have these to use them in doing their work, and class lectures provide insights to all students from the original scriptural texts, fulfilling Master of Divinity goal #1. Also addressed is alternate goal #1 (as well as goals #2 and #3) in all the Masters degree programs as the presentation of systematic theology is grounded in careful exposition of key texts. Goals #4 through #8 for all the Masters programs are fulfilled as the class lectures apply the information being learned to each program’s interests as they arise. Topics covered relate also both to students’ spiritual growth and local and global ministry. As well, flexibility is allowed in the choice of assignments so that MDiv and M.A. students seeking ordination can do a study for paper #1 of their specific church’s doctrine that can feed into their work toward ordination, while any Master of Arts in Urban Ministry, Youth Ministry, Education Ministry, Counseling students who may not be seeking ordination can work on topics for paper #1 related to their fields. Diploma students are introduced to an overview of the key theological issues on the Atonement, the problem of suffering (a theodicy), eschatology (the end times), the uniqueness of Christ, the nature of the church, with an introduction to several ethnic and global theologies. The final assignment, the personal theology statement, will help students integrate their entire theological training at GCTS as they formulate and express their own understanding of theology. As a practical dimension, many of these have become the basis for the required statement of personal belief required by many denominations and churches’ ordaining bodies and councils.

Student Academic and Moral Requirements: Gordon-Conwell’s “Spiritual Growth” Statement explains: “As a community of believers, our first desire at Gordon-Conwell is to worship and engage with God, both corporately and individually. We believe that academic learning divorced from a life of biblical spirituality and holiness neither honors God nor serves His people. Working with the local church, our goal is to grow our students so that their experiential knowledge of God in Christ is evidenced in their character, outlook, conduct, relationship and involvement in society.” The Semlink plagiarism statement adds, “The Seminary considers all breaches of personal and academic integrity to be serious offenses. As such, the Seminary has a zero tolerance for such behavior.” This policy extends to academic issues, such as cheating (e.g. by bringing in unauthorized sources into exams), plagiarism (i.e. passing another’s words off as one’s own, including copying other student(s)’s work, or taking words or ideas from other sources without citation, quotation marks, or other indications), submitting the same work for two different courses without the professors’ knowledge. GCTS-Boston (CUME)’s “Community Life Statement” also renounces “greed, jealousy, false pride, lust,
bitterness, hostility, an unforgiving spirit and prejudice such as that based on race, sex, and academic or socio-economic status,” and “renounces” moral breaches and “behaviors such as distortion of God’s Word, deception, falsehood, drunkenness [or use of illegal drugs or abuse of prescription drugs], stealing, and sexual immorality such as premarital intercourse, adultery and homosexual behavior,” committing domestic violence, breaking civil laws, promoting slander against the character of others and infringements against the rights of others and other such behavior unbecoming a Christian leader. All of these are grounds for penalties, including dismissal. Instead, CUME’s statement counsels, “We will seek to practice an attitude of mutual submission according to the mind of Christ, recognizing that at times our personal rights and preferences must be put aside for the sake of others’ conscience and the good of the community.” Our goal is to serve God by becoming more Christ-like, and so, “we will seek to encourage the cultivation of such spiritual attitudes as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Required Textbooks: according to their appearance in the syllabus:

   OR
   OR
   OR
   OR
   James Cone, For My People: Black Theology and the Black
8. Aída Dina Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*  
(ISBN: 10 0-80104749; 13 978-080104749)

**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.

**CLASS OVERVIEW**

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, CLASS 1, 6:00 to 10:00 p.m.**


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:**  
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."

REQUIRED WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 due third class for those wishing the option to redo.

NOVEMBER 12, CLASS 2

Topic: THE ATONEMENT: Classic and current debates on the nature and significance of the Atonement effected by Jesus Christ, including why this issue is important for global Christians, with reference to the work of the Spirit in the regeneration and sanctification of believers.

REQUIRED READING: Park, A. & W. Spencer, REACHING FOR THE NEW JERUSALEM; Smith, THE LORD’S SUPPER, or Wright, BAPTISM; Erickson, CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, Part 9: Chapters 41-42 on the Holy Spirit; or Calvin, INSTITUTES, Book 1: Chaps. 7, 12; or Wiley, INTRODUCTION, Unit 2: Chap. 7, Unit 5: Chap. 14.


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

NOVEMBER 19, CLASS 3

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, historic, evangelical exclusivist positions regarding the lost by
Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Manton, Bruce Demarest and examine representative inclusivist challenges by John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Paul Knitter, Karl Rahner, John Cobb, Jr., John Sanders, Clark Pinnock.

REQUIRED READING: on Eschatology: Clouse, MEANING OF MILLENNIUM, FOUR VIEWS; McGrath, Reader: Chapter 10: On Last Things; Erickson, Part 12: The Last Things; or Calvin, Book 3, Chap. 20, sect. 42; Wiley, Unit 7, Chaps. 21-22.

Recommended Reading:

November 26, Class 4

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 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, along with theological Issues in the Contemporary Church (modern to post-modern) with special attention to the nature, functions, and challenges to ethnic ecclesiology in an increasingly multicultural world.

REQUIRED READING: Erickson, Part 11-12: Chaps 50-55 on the church; or Calvin, Book 4: Chaps 1-12; or Wiley, Unit 6: Chaps 19-20; McGrath, CHRISTIAN READER, Section 7 (The Church); A. & W. Spencer and Haddad, GLOBAL VOICES IN BIBLICAL EQUALITY (with special attention to chapters 3-6); or Cone, FOR MY PEOPLE, BLACK THEOLOGY AND THE BLACK CHURCH.
**MONDAY, DECEMBER 2, 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 in Dr. Aída Spencer’s office in the basement of the library in Hamilton.

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 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?


Recommended Reading: Alvin Padilla, Roberto Goizueta, Eldin Villafaña, Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century; Aída Besançon Spencer, The Goddess Revival; Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her; Dorothy Sayers, Are Women Human? Ford, Modern Theologians: 575-582, Cone: Black Theology and Black Power, God of the Oppressed; Boff: Ecclesiogenesis: the
DECEMBER 10, 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 (PLEASE NOTE: This topic is not infant baptism vs. believer’s baptism and there are also two main meanings of infant baptism you should discuss. Those selecting this option would be wise to consult our textbook BAPTISM: THREE VIEWS and 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 may be) 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?

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. No redoings will be accepted
for any reason after the 7th class. First drafts will be accepted
only with the official approval of the registrar after that date.

Blessings.