Calvin and Barth on Election

Course Syllabus
Fall 2012

Instructor

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Office Hours: T, 2:00–5:00; and by appointment.

Description

This seminar will closely examine the distinctive doctrinal formulations of election in John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and in Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. Seminar discussions and additional reading and research will be used to comparatively analyze, critically evaluate, and finally assess the scriptural warrant, theological cogency, and practical/missional value of these significantly different doctrinal formulations in light of their historical contexts and the continuing debate.

Objectives

• Reflect on what it means to think theologically in an evangelical Christian context through critical engagement with the thought of two important Protestant theologians.

• Gain a better understanding of the doctrine of election as formulated by Calvin and Barth focusing on the wider context of their theological projects and their use of Scripture and tradition in the formulation of the doctrine.

• Hone our critical exegetical skills through close reading and discussion of seminal texts in the history of Christian thought. We will also hone our analytical skills in evaluating a key doctrinal theme in Christian thought as represented by Calvin and Barth, gaining an understanding of the controversies and an appreciation of the value of their insights for contemporary evangelical theology, for the mission of the church, and for our own theological reflection and development.

• Cultivate precision in our written, spoken, and listening discourse through essays, presentations, and discussions dealing with complex and controversial theological texts and ideas.

Required Reading


John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics, vols. XX–XXI, ed. by John T. McNeill, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Westminster John Knox, 1950). Volume 2 (XXI) will be the focus of this course, but the full two volume set is worth owning and will be consulted for context and background.


Additional supplemental readings will be posted on CAMS.

**Requirements**

**Seven Reaction Papers**

Seven 2–3 page papers reacting to the course reading are required. These papers should critically respond to the course required reading in preparation for the seminar discussions. Each paper should be written as a collection of statements or glosses (comments, interpretations, questions, criticisms, etc.). Each paper must respond to the required reading due for that week. The following examples of general critical questions may help guide your engagement with the reading and the formulation of your paper:

- What stands out to me? (Reflecting on interest)
- What surprises me? (Reflecting on distance)
- What puzzles me? (Reflecting on learning opportunities)
- What connections do I make? (Reflecting on integration)
- What implications are there? (Reflecting on application)

A Reaction Papers is due weeks 2–8 at the end of each class.
**Response Essay**

Students will write one **8–10 page** essay for the course. Developing the work done in the Reaction Papers, and now with reflection on the whole of the course reading, discussions, and presentations, students will comparatively analyze and evaluate the doctrinal formulations of election by both Calvin and Barth. You should assess each theologian’s use of Scripture and tradition, the comparative theological cogency of their formulations, and the practical/missional significance of their formulations for the church. Key questions concerning these doctrinal formulations might also be raised, and where the student is yet undecided, a discussion of the key remaining difficulties may also be offered. Additional research should also be used, with appropriate citation and bibliography.

The Response Essay will be evaluated on: 1) thoroughness, conciseness, and clarity of thought; 2) demonstrated significant, thoughtful, critical engagement with the reading; 3) accuracy in representing each theologian’s formulation of the doctrine; and 4) the quality of writing and presentation.

The Response Essay is **due December 10 at the beginning of class.**

**Seminar Presentation**

Students will make one presentation for the class. The Seminar Presentation will be 10-15 minutes and will focus on the section of reading due for that day. The purpose of the presentation is to highlight key theological points, arguments, issues, and/or controversies, and to help facilitate discussion. Presenting students will submit an outline or a written handout at the beginning of class. A sign-up sheet for student presentations will be circulated at the first class meeting. Presentations will be scheduled for weeks 2–8.

The Seminar Presentation will be evaluated on: 1) thoroughness, conciseness, and clarity of thought; 2) significant, thoughtful, critical engagement with the reading; 3) accuracy in representing the key ideas in the reading; and 4) demonstrated seriousness of preparation and contribution to the seminar discussion.

**Additional Information Concerning Written Assignments**

• Written assignments should be typed in 12 point, Times New Roman-type font, double spaced, 1 inch margins, and with a cover page that clearly states your campus mailbox number. Students should make consistent use of a style manual of their choice.

• The preferred means of submitting assignments is in hard copy at the end of class, in my campus mailbox (#223), or slipped under/deposited in the box in front of my office door (GL108). Please submit assignments as an email attachment only when absolutely necessary, and do not assume the instructor has received an emailed assignment until a verification is sent in response.

**Plagiarism**

Helpful guidelines on plagiarism can be found on the Indiana University website listed below. This document has the official recognition of the Gordon-Conwell faculty and provides helpful tools to guide you as you prepare your papers. Website address: http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/plagiarism.html.

**Grading**

The relative weight of the course requirements will be distributed as follows:

- Reaction Papers: 40%
- Response Essay: 40%
- Seminar Presentation: 20%
Schedule

WEEK 1 (9/10): Course Introduction; Scriptural and Historical Context

Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints.* (CAMS)

WEEK 2 (9/17): Calvin

Calvin, “Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans: Chapter IX.” (CAMS)
*Calvin: Commentaries,* “Election and Predestination.” (CAMS)
Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians.* (CAMS)
Clark, “Election and Predestination: The Sovereign Expressions of God (3.21–24).” (CAMS)

WEEK 3 (9/24): Calvin

Calvin, “Articles Concerning Predestination.” (CAMS)
Battles, *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin.* (Handout)

WEEK 4 (10/1): Barth


WEEK 5 (10/15): Barth


WEEK 6 (10/22): Barth

Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* II.2, §34: “The Election of the Community,” 1–110.

WEEK 7 (10/29): Barth


WEEK 8 (11/5): Barth


WEEK 9 (12/3): Comparative Analysis

Gibson, “The day of God’s mercy: Romans 9–11 in Barth’s doctrine of election.” (CAMS)
Horton, “Covenant, Election, and Incarnation: Evaluating Barth’s Actualist Christology.” (CAMS)
McCormack, “So That He May be Merciful to All: Karl Barth and the Problem of Universalism” (CAMS)
McDonald, “Evangelical Questioning of Election in Barth: A Pneumatological Perspective from the Reformed Heritage.” (CAMS)

WEEK 10 (12/10): Evaluation: Discussion of Student Response Essays

IMPORTANT DATES:

10/8, 11/12 — Reading Weeks
11/19, 11/26 — No Class
12/10 — Response Essay Due