Long considered a theological classic, John Calvin’s, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, was read as an authoritative expression of Reformation Christianity in his own day, and it continues to be regarded as one of the most important texts of Protestant thought today. This course provides students an opportunity to critically engage the whole of Calvin’s 1559 edition of the *Institutes*. The text will be studied with both attention to its historical context in the sixteenth-century Reformation, and a focus on its enduring spiritual power to speak to the life, faith and ministry of the contemporary church.

**Course Objectives**

- Reflect on what it means to think theologically in an evangelical Christian context through critical engagement with the thought of a great Protestant theologian.

- Gain a better understanding of the content of Calvin’s theology as expressed in the *Institutes*, his use of Scripture and tradition, the important theological issues addressed, and the impact of his theology on both the Protestant Reformation and on the subsequent development of the Reformed faith in the modern and contemporary Christian church.

- Evaluate the key themes and viewpoints of Calvin’s theology with an understanding of the lasting controversies, and an appreciation of the value of his insights for contemporary Evangelicalism and your own theological reflection and development.

- Gain a deeper appreciation of your own theological heritage and your place in the community of faith that transcends the boundaries of time and location; and a clearer vision and intellectual context for a lifetime of theological study that is expressed in continuing personal growth, and well-informed and articulate ministry.

**Required Course Texts**


**Recommended Optional Texts**


Requirements (Choose either OPTION #1 or OPTION #2)

OPTION #1: Reading Response Essays

Three five page essays responding to three different passages in Calvin’s *Institutes* (each passage may include one or more key sections within a chapter, a complete chapter, or a number of pages that follow a theme or issue over multiple chapters). Please clearly indicate the pages you are addressing at the beginning of each essay (a title is not necessary, but your first paragraph should clearly state the focus of the essay).

Each essay must be a response to the reading, rather than a summary or explication. Students should seek to analyze and evaluate the chosen passage as a whole, reflecting on the exegetical support, theological cogency, or practical significance of a key theme, argument, issue, criticism, or an important point Calvin makes that is of particular personal interest. Students should consult Scripture, as well as additional primary and/or secondary sources to aid in this analysis, and these sources should be clearly identified in the footnotes/endnotes, and bibliography.

The essay will be evaluated on: 1) thoroughness, conciseness, and clarity of thought; 2) demonstrated significant, thoughtful, critical engagement with the reading; and 3) the quality of writing and presentation.

The Reading Response Essays are due October 25, November 22, and December 20 by 4:00pm.

The following examples of general critical questions may help guide your engagement with the reading and the formulation of your response:

- 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)

Seminar Presentation

Students choosing Option #1 may also choose to make one 10–15 minute Seminar Presentation in place of one Reading Response Essay. The seminar presentation will focus on the section of reading from the *Institutes* that is 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 second class meeting.

OPTION #2: Research Paper

With the instructor’s approval, a limited number of students may write a 15 page paper researching any topic of interest that is also clearly relevant to the theology of John Calvin as discussed in the *Institutes*. The Research Paper should demonstrate significant engagement with both primary and secondary sources. These sources should be clearly identified in the footnotes or endnotes, and bibliography.

A one-page research proposal with preliminary bibliography will be due by November 22.

Research papers will be evaluated on 1) thoroughness, conciseness, and clarity of thought; 2) demonstrated significant and thoughtful critical engagement with the topic under consideration, and with the primary and secondary sources; and 3) the quality of writing and presentation.

The Research Paper will be due on December 20 by 4:00 pm.
OPTION #1 and OPTION #2 (Required of All Students):

Ten Reaction Papers

Nine 1-2 page papers reacting to the course reading are required. These papers are less formal than the Reading Response Essay described under Option #1, but should follow the same guidelines and general critical questions for the purpose of reflecting on the reading and bringing a prepared contribution to the seminar discussions. The paper should be written as a collection of statements or glosses (comments, interpretations, questions, criticisms, etc.). Each paper must respond to the required primary reading due for that week.

Students should make a copy of each reaction paper to submit at the beginning of class (you should keep the other copy for the discussion and for your own records). Reaction papers will only be accepted as a hard copy submitted at the beginning of class from students who are attending that day’s seminar. Students making a seminar presentation need not submit a reaction paper on their presentation day in addition to the outline or handout. A Reaction Paper will be due each week of the course beginning with week 2 for a total of eleven papers. Two of these reaction papers will be dropped in computing the final course grade.

A final 1 page reaction paper will be due at the end of the course. This last paper should be written as a short essay. Students will apply the critical questions above to reflect on their study of the whole of the Institutes. This essay will be an opportunity to formulate a final assessment of the value of studying this text for the contemporary church and for your own life and ministry.

This final Reaction Paper will be due on December 20 by 4:00 pm.

Reading/Discussion Questions

Students are also required to prepare brief answers to an ongoing set of questions that will help guide the reading and the discussions throughout the course.

Participation

You are expected to be faithful to your calling as a student through preparation, attendance, and involvement in the course. Significant learning will take place in the context of the classroom community. Students will be evaluated on their timely completion and thoughtful engagement with each reading assignment and their participation in each class discussion. You will have an opportunity to account for your attendance and completed reading on the Completed Reading Form available on CAMS.

The Completed Reading Form is due by 4:00 pm on December 20.

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 beginning 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. *See separate instructions above for submitting Reaction Papers

- Final written work submitted on December 20 should include a Final Reaction Paper, a Completed Reading Form, and either a Reading Response Essay or a Research Paper.
Audits and Pass/Fail

Students are permitted to take the course as audit or as Pass/Fail. All auditors are required to attend each class session, complete the assigned textbook reading, submit all reactions papers, and participate in the seminar discussions. Students will receive the grade of ‘Pass’ by completing all the audit requirements and also submitting one Reading Response Essay or making one Seminar Presentation.

Grading

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

- Reaction Papers (Total of 10) 30%
- Completed Reading Form 20%
- OPTION #1 — Reading Response Essays/Seminar Presentation
- OPTION #2 — Research Paper 50%

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 very helpful tools to guide you as you prepare your papers/exams. In order to save paper, we have provided you with the website address: http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/plagiarism.html.

Note: The instructor reserves the right to revise the contents of this course syllabus as necessary.
## Reading/Discussion Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>TOPICS</th>
<th>READING: INSTITUTES</th>
<th>READING: PARKER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Knowing God and Ourselves; God Revealed in Creation; The Bible and the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>I.i.–ix. pp. 35–96</td>
<td>Part 1, ch.1–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Creator; Idolatry; The Trinity; The Created World; Angels</td>
<td>I.x.–xiv. pp. 96–182</td>
<td>Part 1, ch. 4–5.ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Humanity as Created; Image of God; Free Will; God’s Sovereign Providence</td>
<td>I.xv.–I.xviii. pp. 183–237</td>
<td>Part 1, ch. 5.iii–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fallen Humanity; Original Sin; Bondage of the Will; How God Works in the Human Heart</td>
<td>II.i.–II.v. pp. 241–340</td>
<td>Part 2, ch. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Place of the Law; Exposition of the Moral Law; Relation between the Old and New Testaments; The Person of Jesus Christ; The Redemptive Work of Jesus Christ</td>
<td>II.vi.–II.xvii pp. 340–534</td>
<td>Part 2, ch. 2–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Saving Faith; Regeneration and Repentance; The Christian Life: Self-Denial; The Christian Life: Bearing Our Cross and Attitude toward This Life</td>
<td>III.i.–III.x. pp. 537–725 (Optional: 622–84) [126]</td>
<td>Part 3, ch. 1–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Justification by Faith; The Value of Our Good Works; The True Nature of Christian Freedom; Prayer</td>
<td>III.xi.–III.xx. pp. 725–920</td>
<td>Part 3, ch. 3–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The True Church; The Roman Church and the Christian Ministry; The Authority of the Church; Church Discipline</td>
<td>IV.i.–IV.xiii pp. 1011–1276 (Optional: 1068–1149) [184]</td>
<td>Part 4, ch. 1–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The Sacraments in General; Baptism and Infant Baptism</td>
<td>IV.xiv.–IV.xvi. pp. 1276–1359</td>
<td>Part 4, ch. 4.i–4.ii</td>
</tr>
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