TH 504: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY I
Tuesdays, 1:15 – 4:15 p.m.; Fall, 2009
Dr. John Jefferson Davis, Instructor

Introduction

This course is designed to give you a general introduction to the nature, history, and methodology of systematic theology, and insight into the nature of the relationship of systematic theology to the other disciplines of the seminary curriculum. The course will focus on a study of authority in Christian theology, scripture, revelation, hermeneutics, and the doctrine of God. This course also serves as a general introduction to other courses in Systematic Theology.

Course Objectives

Attitudes

1. To increase appreciation for the value of theology in ministry and the Christian life.

2. To increase confidence in the authority of scripture.

Information

1. To increase knowledge of basic theological concepts, definitions, and doctrines.

2. To provide information for building a personal theological library.

Skills

1. To provide tools and skills for doing theological research.

2. To increase skills for applying theological insights to practical situations in ministry.

These objectives are believed to be in keeping with the seminary’s educational goals as stated in its Mission Statement, e.g., Art.1, helping students to become “knowledgeable in God’s Word … competent .. in its application in the contemporary world”; Art.2, “academic excellence in … theological disciplines”; Art.3, to “encourage students … to become skilled in ministry”; Art.4, to “cultivate Christ-like character”; and Art.5, to provide resources for “shaping an effective evangelical presence in Church and society.”

Textbooks

Davis, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (distributed electronically)
Davis, The Ontology of Worship, chpts.1-3 (distributed electronically)
Boff, Trinity and Society
H. Coward, Pluralism in the World Religions
[Grenz, Primer on Postmodernism: recommended; not required]
Requirements

1. Sustain a midterm exam. (Tuesday, October 27th); complete “Five Practices of Right Comprehension” assignment (due Tuesday, October 27th);
2. Sustain a final exam (Tuesday, December 8th, class time); turn in “Scripture Meditation” assignment (due Tuesday, December 8th).
3. Optional: write a 10-12 page research paper on a topic related to the course. (See Appendix I for sample topics; due date: no later than December 22nd, 4 p.m.

Evaluation

For the final evaluation, the midterm and the “Five Practices” assignment will count 50%, and the final exam and the Scripture Meditation assignment will count 50%. If the optional paper is chosen, the paper will count one-third, and the other assignments Two-thirds.

Grade Scale: A = 93-100; A- = 90-92; B+ = 88-89; B = 83-87; B- = 80-82; C+ = 78-79; C = 73-77; C- = 70-72; D = 65-69; F = 0-64.

Outline of Course Topics:

1. Introduction: Role of theology in the church; “ontological framework” (D: 1)
2. Doctrine of the Trinity (E: 16; Boff:1-5; Ontology: 1)
3. Attributes of God (E: 13,14, 15; Boff: 6-10; Ontology: 2)
4. Ontology of Worship (Ontology: 3; Boff: 11-15)
5. Election and Predestination (E: 17)
6. Revelation and Inspiration (E: 6-10; D: 171-186)
7. Inerrancy (E: 11; D: 186-199)
8. General Revelation (E: 8; C:1)
9. Spiritual Experience in Theology and the Christian Life (E: 12; D: 5; C:2)
10. Canon of Scripture (D: 199-205; C:3)
11. Biblical Hermeneutics (D: 245-263; C:4)
12. Dispensationalism (D: 263-279; C:5)
13. Church Tradition and the Roman Catholic Understanding of Authority (D: 7; C:6)
14. Method in Systematic Theology: Contextualization (E: 1-5; D: 2; C:7)
Appendix I: Research Papers

The objective of the research paper is to give the student an opportunity to explore one theological issue in some depth and to develop skills for doing theological analysis and research.

The paper is to be 12-15 pages in length, double-spaced, with footnotes either at the end of the paper or at the bottom of the pages. Sources for the paper should include scholarly books, journal articles, and biblical commentaries, as appropriate.

Sample Topics

- Contextualization and World Missions
- Contextualization of the Gospel in an Islamic Context
- Contextualization and “Seeker-Driven” Worship Services
- Biblical Criticism and Inerrancy
- Canonicity of the Old Testament
- Canonicity of the New Testament
- Dispensational Hermeneutics
- OT Prophecy and the Modern State of Israel
- General Revelation and Law in a Pluralistic Society
- Are there apostles today?
- Are all the spiritual gifts valid for today?
- New Revelation Claims and the Cults
- What about those who die never having heard the gospel?
- Predestination and Election: Calvinism vs. Arminianism
- Pastoral Implications of the Attributes of God
- Does prayer change things?
- Is the doctrine of the Trinity scriptural?
- The Social Trinity in Contemporary Theology

These topics are only suggestions. Other topics relevant to the course may be selected with the instructor's advice and approval.

Due Date: on or before Tuesday, December 22nd at 4:00 p.m.

Late Penalties: One-half letter grade for lateness of 1-3 days; one letter grade for lateness of 4-7 days.
Appendix II: Study Questions

1. What functions has systematic theology fulfilled in the life of the church over the centuries? How is it related to ministry today?

2. What is the difference between "Biblical theology" and "systematic theology"? How are they related?

3. How would you respond to someone who said, "Why study theology? Isn't the Bible enough?"

4. Who are some of the chief figures in the history of systematic theology?

5. What are some of the ways in which the relationship of faith and reason has been understood over the centuries? In your view, what place does reason play in the Christian life?

6. How would you respond to a Roman Catholic argument that there are oral traditions which are necessary for church doctrine?

7. How would you respond to someone who claimed to be an "apostle" who had received new doctrines through a private revelation?

8. What role does personal spiritual experience play in Christian theology? Could an unregenerate person write an orthodox theology textbook?

9. What is the biblical basis for the concept of "general revelation?" How is general revelation related to apologetics? Does the non-Christian know God? In what sense?

10. How would you reply to someone who claimed that special revelation is "personal," not propositional? Cite scripture texts.

11. In what sense do we as Christians possess "absolute" truth? How does this affect our view of non-Christian religions? Can anyone be saved without hearing the gospel?

12. Distinguish between revelation, inspiration, and illumination. In what sense does God "inspire" Christians today?


14. How is the inspiration of the New Testament established?

15. Discuss the concept of "limited" inerrancy. Do you consider this a viable option?

16. What are some of the common objections to inerrancy? How would you reply?

17. Is the Christian canon still open? How was the canon established?

18. List some basic rules of biblical hermeneutics. How are these rules related to a Christian doctrine of God's nature?

19. "The Bible is a culturally conditioned book." Comment on this assertion, as it relates to biblical authority.

20. List the common theistic proofs. In what sense are they valid?
21. Discuss the concepts of equivocal, univocal, and analogical language about God. What is the basis for analogical language?


23. What are some practical implications of the holiness of God?

24. Does God's will have any limitations?

25. Demonstrate the deity of Christ from specific scripture texts.

26. State the essential elements of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. What are some of the more common Trinitarian heresies?

27. Prove the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit from scripture.

28. What texts could a Calvinist cite on the doctrine of election? How would an Arminian interpret these texts? What are the key differences between the two positions?

29. Does prayer change things? Does it change God's mind? If not, why pray?