TH 504 — SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY I

Course Syllabus

Instructor: Peter D. Anders
GL108; ext. 4124; panders@gcts.edu

Office Hours: Mondays 6–7:30pm, Tuesdays 2:00–5:00pm, and Fridays 9–10:30am

Course Description: A study of theological method, general and special revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and canonicity of Scripture; existence, attributes and triune nature of God.

Objectives

*By the end of this course you will have:*

- Reflected on what it means to think theologically in an evangelical Christian context; and deepened your understanding of the nature, relevance and role of systematic theology in your Christian life and ministry.
- Identified, evaluated, and demonstrated the basic task and method of Evangelical systematic theology and thought through the contemporary issues concerning its sources and rationale.
- Sharpened your understanding of the doctrine of Holy Scripture, and affirmed both its central place in Christian life and thought, and its critical role in the task and method of systematic theology.
- Defined, biblically supported, and confidently articulated the Christian doctrine of God; reflecting on the existence and knowledge of God, the glory and majesty of God’s being, and especially on the meaning and relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity for Christian life, thought, and worship.
- Gained 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 Texts


Student’s choice of at least five additional supplemental readings posted on CAMS.
Optional Helpful Texts


Adler, Mortimer J. and Charles Van Doren. *How to Read a Book.* Rev. ed. Touchstone, 1972. (Described as a classic guide to intelligent reading, this book has proven very helpful for developing better reading skills.)

Allen, Diogenes and Eric O. Springsted. *Philosophy for Understanding Theology,* 2nd ed. Westminster, 2007. (A very helpful historical treatment of the major philosophical ideas and issues that have helped to shape the development of theology.)


Feinberg, John S. *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God.* Foundations of Evangelical Theology. Crossway, 2006. (A comprehensive and contemporary work in Evangelical theology proper dealing with a full range of theological and philosophical issues, movements, and perspectives on the subject.)

Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity.* Rev. ed. HarperCollins, 2001. (This course will provide a good context for reading or re-reading this popular modern apologetic text written in Lewis’s distinctive insightful and informal style.)

Lints, Richard. *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomena to Evangelical Theology.* Eerdmans, 1993. (This text sets out an insightful and coherent vision and framework for the nature, task, and method of Evangelical theology in the contemporary world. Lints discusses what a truly transformative theology should look like, and what this would mean for the way Evangelicals think and live.)

Muller, Richard. *Dictionary of Latin & Greek Theological Terms.* Baker Books, 1985. (A helpful reference that makes accessible the Greek and Latin terms and concepts found in works of dogmatics drawing from our rich heritage in Protestant Scholastic theology.)

Packer, J. I. *Knowing God.* InterVarsity, (1973), 1993. (A modern classic that has ministered to well over a million Christians the great truth of what it means to know God. Theologically sound, accessible, and practical, this text would make edifying devotional reading to go along with this course.)

Course Requirements

**Assignment #1: Theological Position Essay**

1,500-word max. The essay will concisely address a point of doctrine covered in this course and develop it in conversation with a concisely stated opposing point of view. *The essay may not be longer than 5 pages.*

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Students are required to: 1) chose a doctrinal issue of particular importance to you and discuss your position concerning its meaning, biblical support, and/or practical implications; 2) identify a serious objection to your position, stating how and why it is opposed to your view; and 3) clearly state your own answer to this objection and why you think your own position is correct, more biblically accurate, and/or more practically significant.

The theological position you take will not affect your grade, but rather the grade will be based on the clarity, thoroughness, and seriousness of thought that went into the presentation of your position, an objection, and your answer to that objection. Students should also seek to incorporate into these essays what they have learned from the lectures, discussions, and the required reading of this course. Scripture should also be engaged exegetically where appropriate.
The Theological Position Essay is **due on November 4.**

The Theological Position Essay submitted for Assignment #1 may be revised and re-submitted. The best grade will be used as the final grade for that assignment. This option applies only to the TPE submitted for Assignment #1.

**Please note the following concerning the option to revise/re-submit your TPE:**

- Only TPEs with a score lower than 90 may be revised/re-submitted. Revised TPEs may not receive a score higher than 93.

- Your original graded TPE must be attached to your revised TPE when it is submitted to the instructor.

- Revised Theological Position Essays must be re-submitted **no later than December 9.**

**GUIDELINES FOR A SUCCESSFUL THEOLOGICAL POSITION ESSAY:**

- Keep your topic to a single issue. If you say that you want to argue this *and this*, you are most likely doing too much. **Your essay may not be longer than the strict five page limitation.**

- Stick as close as you can to the assigned structure: your clearly and precisely stated position; one concisely stated objection to your position; your answer to that objection.

- Give a topic sentence at the beginning of the essay that clearly lays out your goals strictly stated in terms of this structure, then let it guide you throughout. Ex: “In this essay I will state my position on the important issue of divine (im)passibility; I will state an important objection to my position from the theology of Jürgen Moltmann; and I will then answer this objection.”

- Give a clear, fair, and concise presentation of an objection to your position — 1 or 2 paragraphs in the body of your paper and no place else (this objection can be from a particular theology/theologian, a movement, a commonly held view, a view you used to hold, etc.), then answer this objection only.

- Remember that the TPE is not meant to be a research paper, however, if you chose to draw directly from work that is not your own be sure to give proper citation with footnotes/endnotes and bibliography.

- Samples of Theological Position Essays are posted on CAMS.

- Students should consult the *Grading Rubric for Theological Position Essays* posted on CAMS.

**Assignment #2:**

For assignment #2 students have the option of writing a Reading Response Essay or writing a second Theological Position Essay

**Reading Response Essay (Option 1)**

**1,500-word max.** An essay responding to your choice of: Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology*; Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*; or John Webster, *Holy Scripture*.

The Reading Response Essays 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 Essay is due December 21 by 4:00pm.

NOTE: The Reading Response Essay must be a response to the text, rather than merely a summary or explication of the text. Students should seek to analyze the text as a whole, reflecting especially on key themes, arguments, issues, criticisms, and/or points that are of particular personal interest. The following examples of general critical questions may help guide your engagement with the text 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)

Second Theological Position Essay (Option 2)

Alternatively, students may meet the Assignment #2 requirement by writing a second Theological Position Essay, following the same guidelines as Assignment #1. The topic of your second TPE must be clearly distinct from your first TPE, and your second TPE may not be revised and re-submitted.

The Second Theological Position Essay is due December 21 by 4:00pm.

Important 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.

Final written work submitted on December 21 should include a Reading Response Essay or a second Theological Position Essay, and a Completed Reading Form.

- Late assignments will be subject to a grade reduction penalty at the discretion of the instructor. It is the GCTS Registrar’s policy that no written work may be accepted by the professor after 4:00 pm on December 21 without an extension granted by the Registrar’s office.

Final Exam

A Final Exam will be taken online through CAMS anytime during the scheduled final exam week. The exam will consist of both objective and essay questions covering the course lectures and required course textbooks (a list of study terms and concepts is available on CAMS). You are encouraged to discuss the study list with other students in the class before the exam date. You will be given three hours to complete the exam. This is a closed book exam.
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. Assigned reading outside of class is meant to supplement the lectures and discussions and will provide a necessary aid for learning the material. You will have an opportunity to account for your attendance and completed reading (including the 5 required CAMS supplemental readings) on the Completed Reading Form available on CAMS.

The Completed Reading Form is due by 4:00pm on December 21.

Grading

Students should consult the Grading Rubrics Form posted on CAMS. The relative weight of the course requirements will be distributed as follows:

- Final Exam 40%
- Assignment #1: TPE 25%
- Assignment #2: RRE or TPE(2) 25%
- Completed Reading Form 10%

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. Website address: http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/plagiarism.html.

Personal Recorders and Computers

Recording of lectures is normally not permitted. Exceptions are made on an individual basis and is generally granted to students for whom English is a second language. It is always agreed that tape recordings are for personal use only, will not be distributed without prior permission from the instructor, and will be erased at the end of the course.

Students are permitted to use laptop computers during class for note-taking and course related purposes only. Students who cause a distraction to the instructor and to fellow students by abusing this privilege will be asked to withdraw from the course.

Recommended Links (additional links may also be found at these sites)

Catholic Encyclopedia: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/
Christian Classics Ethereal Library: http://www.ccel.org
MIT’s Internet Classics Archive: http://classics.mit.edu/
Modern Reformation: www.modernreformation.org
The Perseus Digital Library: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/
http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/
http://www.religion-online.org
Course Schedule and Lecture Topics

WEEK 1 — Course Introduction; The Evangelical Theological Orientation
   Erickson, *Christian Theology*: ch. 1; Berkoff, *Introductory Volume*: 1.I–III
   Stott, *Evangelical Truth*

WEEK 2 — Revelation and the Word of God
   Erickson, *Christian Theology*: chs. 8–9; Berkoff, *Introductory Volume*: 2.III.A–C

WEEK 3 — The Systematic Task and Method of Evangelical Theology
   Erickson, *Christian Theology*: chs. 2–7; Berkoff, *Introductory Volume*: 1.IV–2.II
   Barth, *Evangelical Theology*

WEEK 4 — Trinity
   Erickson, *Christian Theology*: ch. 16; Berkoff, *Systematic Theology*: 1.VIII
   Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*

WEEK 5 — Holy Scripture as Word of God
   Erickson, *Christian Theology*: ch. 12; Berkoff, *Introductory Volume*: 2.III.D

WEEK 6 — The Perfections of Holy Scripture
   Erickson, *Christian Theology*: ch. 10; Berkoff, *Introductory Volume*: 2.IV
   Warfield, *Inspiration.*
   Sproul, *Can I trust the Bible?*

WEEK 7 — The Perfections of Holy Scripture
   Erickson, *Christian Theology*: ch. 11; Berkoff, *Introductory Volume*: 2.V

WEEK 8 — Tradition and Canon
   Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*

WEEK 9 — Knowledge of God
   Erickson, *Christian Theology*: ch. 15; Berkoff, *Systematic Theology*: 1.I–II

WEEK 10 — Attributes of God
   Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God*

IMPORTANT DATES:

9/21 — NO CLASS

10/12, 14; 11/9, 11 — READING WEEKS

11/25 — NO CLASS, HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

12/9 — LAST DAY TO SUBMIT REVISED TPE (Assignment #1 Only)

12/15–17 — FINAL EXAM

12/21 — RRE OR TPE(2) AND COMPLETED READING FORM DUE BY 4:00 PM

NOTE: The instructor reserves the right to revise the contents of this course syllabus as necessary.