ST 508 Scripture, Theology, Anthropology
Dr. Michael Allen

The Course Description

This survey of theology emphasizes the practical application of the doctrines of Scripture, Theology proper, and Anthropology to the ministry of the gospel in contemporary culture.

The Learning Objectives

A crucial reminder as we begin the study of theology (also called “Christian dogmatics”): "Dogmatics is often caricatured as the unholy science that reduces the practices of piety to lifeless propositions. But far from it: dogmatics is that delightful activity in which the Church praises God by ordering its thinking towards the gospel of Christ. Set in the midst of the praise, repentance, witness and service of God's holy people, dogmatics - like all Christian theology - directs the Church's attention to the realities which the gospel declares and attempts responsibility to make those realities a matter of thought" (John Webster, Holiness, p. 8).

The student will grow in their ability to:

(1) Think critically about the Christian faith in an intellectually responsible, spiritually faithful way;
(2) Exegete biblical texts and discern biblical-theological trends which relate to course topics;
(3) Describe the emphases of key figures, movements, and church traditions as regards course topics (e.g., Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Anabaptists);
(4) Understand the confessional teaching of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, especially the Westminster Standards;
(5) Grasp the scope, sequence, and nuance of a Reformed approach to various issues in dogmatic theology (theology proper, anthropology, theological method);
(6) Appreciate the systematic nature of theology by gaining familiarity with the ways in which various beliefs relate to each other;
(7) Consider the relationship between Christian belief and various cultural movements and philosophies;
(8) Finally, deepen loving devotion and witness to the triune God by reflecting on who God is and who God has made us to be.

The Instructor

Michael Allen, Ph.D.
Kennedy Associate Professor of Systematic Theology
Feel free to contact me whenever needed (preferably via email). When in doubt about protocol or anything regarding class material, write and ask.

The Texts

The student is required to read carefully the following two texts in their entirety:


Here are some recommended resources as you begin studying theology:


Theological dictionaries will help give you the lay of the land; for reference. I strongly recommend that seminarians purchase two of these and keep them on your desk at all times for quick and easy reference:

- *The Dictionary of Historical Theology* (ed. Trevor Hart; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); and

Theologians often reference Greek and Latin terms (because so much of church history and doctrinal reflection occurred in times and places where these languages dominated). If you would benefit from a short resource that offered quick definitions of such terms, see:


The Assignments

1. Reading
Reading must be completed before the class in which it is to be discussed (see schedule below on p. 5). Class discussions will focus on readings, so you must be prepared to talk.

Theology is an activity done largely through the process of good reading. Read carefully. Read charitably. Read with others. Read with the expectation that you will learn from others, even when you disagree with their main point. Read even when a text is dense and difficult, for you will learn perseverance and fortitude here. Read that which seems trite and obvious, asking how others might object or criticize. Most importantly, read because God was willing to reveal himself in written words, and because we can best witness to God’s grace with corresponding words. Read because words matter in God’s economy of grace.

Remember: reading is an active exercise.

(2) Reading Briefs

Students are expected to prepare a brief on each chapter read from Billings and Bavinck. The purpose of the brief is to summarize the thesis, outline, and argument of that chapter, as well as to state one’s own analysis of it (in the form of questions, confirmations, objections, etc.). Briefs may include quotations from various points in the chapter (so long as page numbers are referenced). Briefs should be no more than 500 words. They should be written in complete sentences and edited carefully.

Note: each chapter of Bavinck includes an italicized summary at its inception. These are written by the editor, and you may not simply cite them in place of your own summary. You must write your own brief, though you would do well to cross-reference it with the editor’s summary.

Rough drafts of briefs should be brought to class on the day in which that reading will be addressed (see schedule below on p. 5). I will call on students to present their briefs at random, and we will begin classroom discussion based on these presentations. Effective presentations may elevate a student’s grade (at the professor’s discretion).

Note: I will provide a sample brief at the back of the syllabus (see pages 5-6).

Students may submit a final draft of their briefs when they submit their final paper: Friday, June 28. I realize the rough drafts presented in class may not be polished, as they’re prepared in the midst of a busy week, yet these final drafts submitted later should be edited properly and reflect careful thought and preparation.

(3) Final Paper: Response to an Essay on the Trinity

- You will be given a PDF of a classic essay on the Trinity.
- Your task will be to read it carefully and critically.
• The essay should both (a) show accurate understanding of the essay’s argument, and (b) demonstrate thoughtful analysis of the text’s claims.
• Write a 2500-3000 word essay in response.
• References to the essay may be made parenthetically (p. 3).
• No further research is required, though you are encouraged to bring all the resources you have used in this course to bear on this final task (thus, feel free to cite Billings, Bavinck, or my lectures in your essay).
• The essay should be edited carefully for grammar and style.
• Due Friday, June 28 by midnight (EST) via email to the instructor.

**Academic Honesty** (adapted from Dr. Timothy Phillips of Wheaton College)

1. The assignments are designed to extend and deepen your comprehension and appreciation of Christian theology and to increase your facility with theological method. The processes of defining a topic, researching the results of others' studies, critiquing those studies, and organizing your conclusions in a clear and cogent presentation provides valuable skills for your various leadership ministries. The use of sources is an essential step in appropriating the learning of the Church's tradition in its relationship to cultures to help us understand and faithfully practice Scripture.

2. Using information obtained from a source without indicating it (whether by footnote, parentheses, or bibliography or some other appropriate reference, depending on the type of assignment) is plagiarism (intellectual thievery and lying). This applies to any information that you gain from someone that is not “common knowledge.” It does not apply only to exact quotations or precise verbal allusions. Altering the wording does not remove the obligation to acknowledge the source.

3. Cheating is the presentation of someone else’s work, which the student ought to have done personally. This includes submitting answers to test questions derived by some means other than that intended by the instructor. It also includes turning in written assignments composed in whole or in part by someone else.

4. Cheating or plagiarism results in the disqualification of that unit of the course affected. A student caught plagiarizing or cheating will forfeit that project. A second offense will result in the forfeiture of the course.

**The Grading Structure**

Grades will be assessed as follows:

Reading Briefs 50%
The grading scale can be found in the Academic Catalog. As laid out in the catalog, a “B” is the work normally expected of a student. An “A” is given for someone who consistently outperforms expectations, and a “C” is given for persons who only minimally and occasionally meet expectations. Read the Academic Catalog to see what grades reflect.

**Schedule**

Monday  
Due: Reading and briefs prepared on Billings

Tuesday  
Due: Reading and briefs prepared on Bavinck, chs. 1-3

Wednesday  
Due: Reading and briefs prepared on Bavinck, chs. 4-6

Thursday  
Due: Reading and briefs prepared on Bavinck, ch. 7-10

Friday  
Due: Reading and briefs prepared on Bavinck, chs. 11-13

**Sample of a Reading Brief**

Here is a sample reading brief. Note that it provides bibliographic data briefly at the top, references the text parenthetically throughout, offers a brief summary at its inception, follows logical order in its paragraphs, and concludes by noting some key terms to remember.

**George Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities: Justification and Sanctification in Calvin and Barth,” in John Calvin and the Interpretation of Scripture, 223-245.**

George Hunsinger argues that Karl Barth attempts to combine the teaching of John Calvin and Martin Luther regarding the relationship of justification and sanctification; in so doing, he retrieves emphases from each, yet incurs certain losses.

First, Hunsinger describes John Calvin’s teaching regarding the simultaneous gift of justification and sanctification, what Calvin referred to as the “double grace” (*duplex gratia*). Calvin articulates a twofold acceptance before God: in justification believers are declared right for Christ’s sake, in sanctification believers are declared right due to their own transformation by grace. Calvin argues that this transformation is by grace, remains
imperfect, never moves beyond the need for forgiveness, and, thus, involve no merit of our own (229). Hunsinger clearly expresses worry that this talk of a second acceptance might undercut the radicality of our first acceptance (229-231).

Second, Hunsinger offers a brief description of Martin Luther’s soteriology, pointing to a different simultaneity emphasized by this Reformer. “Although Luther, like Calvin, also knows of salvation as a gradual process, unlike Calvin, he subordinates all gradualism to the perpetual advent of grace, which confronts sin continually afresh, and continually overcomes it as a whole” (232). Hunsinger emphasizes that Luther’s approach can be understood in terms of his famous claim that Christians are simultaneously just and sinful \( \textit{simul iustus et peccator} \), and that this simultaneity must be understood holistically: Christians are totally just (in Christ) and totally sinful (in themselves) simultaneously (232).

Third, Hunsinger argues that Karl Barth attempts to combine these two simultaneities. Barth argues that all persons objectively participate in Jesus Christ, and that the experience of faith makes one aware subjectively of what is already objectively true (233). Sanctification becomes the individual’s embrace of this reality in faith, while justification is the objective reality in itself: true in Christ (236-237). It is the daily work of seeing ourselves wholly in Christ rather than in ourselves; thus, grace comes again and again. Hunsinger suggests that there are losses in Barth’s approach: “Calvin had seen the gradual operation of grace more clearly than the perpetual, and Luther had elevated the perpetual operation of grace over the gradual. But both Reformation theologians retained a definite place for the gradual in a way that Barth simply did not” (244). Hunsinger goes so far as to say that “unlike both Calvin and Luther, Barth clearly devotes little attention to the possibility of growth and progress in the Christian life” (244).

Hunsinger argues that Barth’s theology leaves room to develop an idea of gradual sanctification. And “it is important to see that Barth does not eliminate this possibility entirely” (244). Hunsinger believes that it is necessary, then, to recover the breadth of the Reformers approach, specifically, the order suggested by Luther: grace comes “once for all, again and again, and more and more – in that diminishing order of significance” (244).

Key Terms: justification, sanctification, \textit{simul iustus et peccator}, \textit{duplex gratia}, union with Christ
Key Figures: John Calvin, Martin Luther, Karl Barth