Course description

This course explores biblical doctrine from a systematic perspective. Topics include Scripture, theology proper, and anthropology (3 hours).

Textbooks


Rowan Williams, “‘Good for Nothing’? Augustine on Creation,” in On Augustine (Bloomsbury, 2016). (Available from professor)
Assignments

1. **Psalms report (5 % of final grade):** Students are required to read Psalms 1, 8, 51, 104, 119, and 145 slowly and prayerfully at least four times over the course of the semester. Students will provide a reading report on the second exam indicating whether or not they have done so.

2. **Reading report (20 % of final grade):** Attached to the second exam, students will turn in a reading report stating the percentage of the assigned readings that they have read with reasonable care over the course of the semester.

3. **Exam (50 % of final grade):** Students will take one exam which will test their critical grasp of doctrinal topics covered in class lectures, readings, and the Reformed confessions as well as your ability to communicate doctrinal topics in a clear and cogent manner. The exam is to be uploaded in Canvas by April 8, 2019.

4. **Research paper (25 % of final grade):** Students will write 12-15 page research paper on one of the topics treated in the course. Papers will be evaluated based on their ability (1) to articulate a clear thesis that rests upon sound biblical and theological argumentation and that addresses the strongest counterarguments to the thesis; (2) to engage with appropriate scholarly resources (at least ten, with bibliography attached); (3) to follow the prescribed format (double spaced, Times New Roman font, Turabian format). For more details on the research paper, see below: “How to research and write a research paper.”

Academic Policies

1. **Late assignments:** Apart from exceptional circumstances, I will not accept late assignments for credit.

2. **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, will result in a failing grade for the course.

Schedule of Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>March 18</th>
<th>Ward, all; Allen and Swain, chaps. 1-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 19</td>
<td>Dolezal, all; Allen and Swain, chap. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 20</td>
<td>Emery, all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 21</td>
<td>Allen and Swain, chaps. 6-8;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 22</td>
<td>McFarland, all; Madueme; Murray, all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to research and write a research paper

I. Elements of a sound theological argument

A. Introduction

1. The major elements of a sound theological argument include the following

   a. Thesis/claim
   b. Grounds
   c. Warrants
   d. Backing
   e. Qualifier
   f. Rebuttal

   * Note: These are elements of a sound theological argument, not sections of your research paper.

2. More briefly put, those elements include

   a. Thesis/claim
   b. Arguments and evidence that support your thesis
   c. Arguments and evidence that rebut objections to your thesis

B. Thesis/claim: A thesis statement is the major claim or assertion of your research paper. The entire research paper is devoted to establishing your thesis through sound biblical and theological argumentation and to defending your thesis against objections.

1. Diagnostic questions

   a. Is my thesis statement significant?
   b. Is my thesis statement specific?

2. Examples of good thesis statements

   a. “Although the Westminster Standards do not refer explicitly to the doctrine of the *pactum salutis*, the substance of the doctrine as taught by many 17th century Reformed divines is affirmed therein.”

   b. “In his controversial redefinition of the traditional Protestant doctrine of justification, N. T. Wright confuses the general issue of covenant membership..."
with the particular issue of justification, which does not connote one’s covenant membership but one’s legal right to covenant blessings.”

c. “Although Reformed systematic theology is sometimes accused of neglecting the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the triadic structure of the Reformed doctrine of salvation (i.e., pactum salutis, historia salutis, ordo salutis) provides a robust framework for appreciating the Holy Spirit’s role in saving sinners.”

d. “The grace of adoption is the temporal term (i.e., goal) of the Son’s incarnate mission.”

3. A good resource for developing a theological thesis: the “quaestio” (see, for example, Zacharias Ursinus' Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism or Francis Turretin’s Institutes of Elenctic Theology)

4. Distinguishing the “order of discovery” from the “order of composition”: a good plan of research that leads to a good research paper

a. Usually, one develops a thesis very late in the process of researching a topic.

b. Thus, one’s research strategy should not be first to devise a thesis and then to do one’s research.

c. Rather, one should (i) find a topic that interests you, (ii) research it thoroughly, (iii) gather a broad understanding of the issues, questions, debates, and arguments related to your topic, and (iv) finally construct a thesis that one can argue on the basis of the research you have undertaken.

d. You can then structure a paper around proving and defending your thesis statement on the basis of your research.

C. Grounds: Grounds provide the reasons and evidences used to support the paper’s thesis/major claim

1. Note: The type of theology paper that you are writing (see II. below) will determine the type of grounds to which you must appeal in establishing your thesis.

2. Potential sources for grounding a theological claim include:

a. Biblical exegesis
b. Ecclesiastical authority (creeds, confessions, trusted doctors of the church, ecclesiastical consensus); in classical dogmatic reasoning, these subordinate authorities provide “probable” arguments in doctrinal argumentation
   c. Historical evidence
d. Rational arguments

e. Reliable scholarship (primary and secondary sources)

D. Warrants: Warrants (which often remain implicit in your paper) connect your grounds to your thesis/claim by explaining the logical relevance of your grounds to your thesis. In other words, warrants answer the question: “Why do these arguments or this evidence ‘count as’ support for this thesis/claim.”

1. You do not always need to state your warrants explicitly. Sometimes warrants are shared by you and your reader or by the persons whose claims are being debated in your paper.

   * For example: A paper criticizing N. T. Wright’s view of justification would not necessarily need to explain why biblical exegesis must be determinative for one’s view of justification. That is not a point of dispute between Wright and confessional Protestants.

2. You may need to spell out your warrants when they are not shared by all parties in a debate, or when the particular relevance of an argument or piece of evidence may not be self-evident to your reader.

   * For example: A paper defending the practice of infant baptism might need to explain why it is that an OT passage would bear on the discussion of a NT sacrament.

3. In the process of your research, you should always ask yourself whether or not your arguments and evidence are warranted, i.e., whether and how they provide support to your thesis/claim.

E. Backing: Backing provides further support for your warrants, though it may not support your thesis directly.

   * For example: In trying to explain the warrant for using OT texts in an argument for infant baptism, you might appeal to the sound hermeneutical practice of building other doctrines via redemptive-historical exegesis, i.e., by reading the Bible from beginning to end.

F. Qualifiers: Qualifiers put limitations on your thesis/claim and protect you from overstating your case.

1. Sample thesis: “Although Reformed systematic theology is sometimes accused of neglecting the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the triadic structure of the Reformed

---

3 Chapter eight of John Frame’s DKG provides a helpful introduction to the use of rational argumentation in theology.
doctrine of salvation (i.e., pactum salutis, historia salutis, ordo salutis) provides a robust framework for appreciating the Holy Spirit’s role in saving sinners."

2. Sample qualifier: “Although Reformed systematic theology is sometimes accused of neglecting the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the triadic structure of the Reformed doctrine of salvation (i.e., pactum salutis, historia salutis, ordo salutis) provides a robust framework for appreciating the Holy Spirit’s role in saving sinners. To be sure, Reformed Christians have sometimes failed to appreciate the significance of the third person of the Trinity, but this occurs as a result of neglecting their system of theology and not as its natural consequence.”

G. Rebuttal: In your rebuttal, you acknowledge, accurately summarize, and refute objections to your claim, as well as the grounds (and sometimes warrants) upon which those objections are based.

* Note: Strong thesis statements are built upon the acknowledgment, fair summarization, and cogent refutation of the strongest possible objections to the thesis.

II. Types of theology papers

A. All papers in this course must articulate and defend a thesis statement related to one of the doctrines discussed in this course.

B. Nevertheless, you may approach your topic from one of the following different perspectives:

1. The primarily exegetical theology paper: Focus on a particular biblical text or series of biblical texts which articulate the biblical “grammar” of your doctrine.

2. The primarily historical theology paper: Focus on a historical figure(s), text(s), or event(s) related to your chosen doctrinal topic.

3. The primarily dogmatic theology paper: Focus on expounding a particular doctrinal locus, providing a summary of the biblical and theological grounds upon which that locus rests, and refuting the major objections to it.

III. Research paper format

A. There is a difference between constructing a sound theological argument (= logic) and presenting a sound theological argument (= rhetoric). Through your research, you will construct a sound theological argument. In your paper, you will present that argument in rhetorically fitting, clear English prose.

B. Paper structure

1. Introduction: The first 2-3 paragraphs of your paper should:
a. Pique the reader’s interest in your topic →

b. Provide a brief introduction to the problem (quaestio) which your paper seeks to address → [Note: your work in I.B.4.c.(iii) provides the basis for this.]

c. Clearly state your thesis—the specific, significant claim that your paper seeks to prove through sound argumentation and evidence and to defend against objections (note: your thesis is a claim that addresses or answers the problem/quaestio you raise in your introduction [see sample theses above]) →

d. Provide a brief overview of the structure of your paper.

2. Body:

a. In the body of your paper, you will elaborate upon your thesis, adequately furnish grounds that support your thesis, discuss and defend warrants as necessary, and deal with objections fairly and decisively.

b. The structure of the body of your paper will vary depending upon the type of paper that you are writing (e.g., exegetical, historical, dogmatic, etc.).

c. Nevertheless, the structure should be transparent to your reader and should be written in such a way that the reader can follow your argument as easily as possible.

3. Conclusion: In the last paragraph of your paper, you will restate/summarize your thesis and its supporting argumentation, and briefly point to the relevance of your thesis for the church’s thought and/or life.

4. Sample structure for the body of a paper written to support the following thesis:
“Although the Westminster Standards do not refer explicitly to the doctrine of the pactum salutis, the substance of the doctrine as taught by many 17th century Reformed divines is affirmed therein.”

a. Introduction

b. Body

   i. Briefly trace the historical development of the doctrine of the pactum salutis and summarize the major elements of the doctrine as presented by 17th century Reformed divines.

   ii. Demonstrate that the term “pactum salutis” (or its terminological equivalents) does not appear in the Westminster Standards.
iii. Demonstrate that the elements of the doctrine do appear in the Westminster Standards; discuss the places where those elements do appear; discuss any terms that appear in the Westminster Standards and that typically appear in discussions of the pactum salutis (e.g., “surety,” etc.).

iv. Discuss reasons (found in your research and/or offered by other scholars) why the pactum salutis is not explicitly mentioned in the Westminster Standards, including suggestions that the Westminster divines either objected to this doctrine or found it otherwise unworthy of inclusion in the Confession and Catechisms.

v. Discuss corroborating evidence for believing that the Westminster Standards affirm the substance of the doctrine (e.g., explicit mention of the doctrine in “The Sum of Saving Knowledge”; explicit mention of the doctrine in The Savoy Declaration; explicit defense of the doctrine by Westminster divines in other publications; etc.).

c. Conclusion

IV. Other requirements

A. The paper should be 12-15 pages, double spaced, 12 pt Times New Roman font, Turabian format

B. The paper should be written in clear, interesting, formal English prose (use a proofreader!), without any grammatical or spelling mistakes.

C. The paper should interact intelligently and fairly with at least 10 scholarly (non-internet) resources.

V. A note on authorial point of view

A. In this research paper, you are not expected to make an original contribution to scholarship or to change the landscape of academic theology in the 21st century.

B. One of the main goals of this paper is to help you become a thoughtful and articulate representative of the church’s confession. In other words, this paper should help you become someone who speaks eloquently for the church on the basis of an intelligent, well-instructed grasp of the biblical and theological foundations of the church’s confession (cf. 2 Pet 3.16).

C. This goal is not a roadblock to true theological creativity but a means of empowering and enabling true theological creativity: One must first have a profound grasp of the “grammar” of theology before one can compose “creative” theological statements (in prayer, sermons, papers, etc.). Too often, we skip the foundational step of mastering our theological “grammar,” and that is why we often stutter.
Select bibliography

In addition to the standard systematic theological works of Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Francis Turretin, Charles Hodge, Herman Bavinck, Karl Barth, etc., the following books will assist further study of the doctrinal topics discussed in this course.


Augustine, *The Trinity* (New City Press, 1991)

Basil the Great, *Hexaëmeron* NPNF, Second Series, Vol. 8 (Eerdmans, n.d.)


C. S. Lewis, “Transposition,” in *The Weight of Glory* (HarperOne, 2001)

Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Revell, 1957)

Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2018—)


Josef Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation* (St. Augustine’s Press, 1998)


Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* (Zondervan Academic, 2016)


Dolf te Velde, ed., *Synopsis of a Purer Theology* (Brill, 2015—)


John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (Bloomsbury, 2014)
### Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

**Course: ST 515**  
**Professor: Swain**  
**Campus: Washington, D.C.**  
**Date: March 2019**

In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.

*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em><em>MDiv</em> Student Learning Outcomes</em>*</th>
<th><strong>Rubric</strong></th>
<th><strong>Mini-Justification</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</strong></td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Exam, paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scripture</strong></td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Focus of all ST courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reformed Theology</strong></td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Focus of all ST courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sanctification</strong></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Emphasized in lectures; part of paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student’s sanctification.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desire for Worldview</strong></td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Focus of all ST courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Winsomely Reformed</strong></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preach</strong></td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>ST provides deeper understanding of Scripture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepherd</td>
<td>Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both in America and worldwide.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church/World</td>
<td>Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>