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DO 501 Basic Christian Doctrine

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BASIC CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE (Final)

DO 501X

Fall 2005

Jason E. Vickers, Ph.D.

Introduction

Welcome to DO 501, Asbury Theological Seminary's introductory course to Christian doctrine. Allow me to begin by introducing myself. Originally from Atlanta GA, I have lived in Nashville TN, Kansas City MO, and Dallas TX. I now reside in Charlotte, NC where I am assistant professor of systematic theology at Hood Theological Seminary and an active member of Central United Methodist Church in Concord, NC. For more on me, check out my resume. Now, let's get to four important questions: What is this course about? What information and skills will I learn through this course? Why is this course important? How will this course work?

I. Course Description: What Is This Course About?

This is an introductory course that bases the theological formation of students upon biblical data as well as upon the classical Christian tradition, contemporary theology, and Wesleyan theological distinctives with a view to helping students grasp the importance of theology for the practice of ministry.

II. Course Objectives: What Information and Skills Will I Learn Through This Course?

By the end of the course students will:

1. Have developed a working Christian doctrinal vocabulary that will support further study in theology and related disciplines.
2. Have grasped the vital connection between Christian doctrine, the Christian life, and the practice of Christian ministry.

3. Have been introduced to all the major areas in the study of Christian theology and doctrine, e.g., the doctrine of the Trinity, Christology, pneumatology or the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, ecclesiology or the doctrine of the Church, and the like.
4. Be able to articulate the distinctive doctrinal emphases of the Wesleyan-Arminian theological tradition, e.g., the doctrines of prevenient grace and entire sanctification.
5. Have further cultivated the worship and love of God with one's own mind and, as a result, have further developed intellectual and theological virtues that are distinctively Christian.

III. Course Rationale: Why Is This Course Important?

This course is vitally important for our formation as Christian persons and as Christian ministers. At one level, this course will help us better to articulate just what it is that we are committed to when we self-identify as Christian persons and as Christian ministers rather than as Jewish Rabbis or as Hindu priests. In other words, this course will help us think more clearly about and be better able to communicate distinctively Christian beliefs about God, Jesus Christ, creation and human persons, sin and salvation, and the like.

At a deeper level, this course will do more than help us better to familiarize ourselves with the language and logic of distinctively Christian doctrines such as the doctrines set forth in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381 AD) and the Chalcedonian Definition (451 AD). To be sure, being able to articulate the content of Christian doctrines is important. However, in this course we will be doing more than simply parroting the words of ancient Christian creeds and confessions of faith. Rather than simply memorizing the cognitive content of Christian doctrine, we will also be thinking about pastoral function of Christian doctrine. In a word, we will be seeking to understand how Christian doctrine is good for us!

IV. Course Procedures: How Will This Course Work?

This course will revolve largely around our discussions in the discussion center (see below for a description of the various components of First Class to be used in this course). These discussions will be based primarily on questions concerning the required readings for the course. I will post these questions in modules as we work our way through the required readings. For now, here is a list of the required readings in the order that we will take them up.

Required Readings

The texts required for this course are as follows:

- A- The Spirit of Early Christian Thought, by Robert Louis Wilken
- B- The Domestication of Transcendence, by William Placher
- C- By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Doctrine,
by Ellen Charry
- D- Essentials of Christian Theology, edited by William Placher

E- Rediscovering the Triune God, by Stanley Grenz

All texts will be available from the bookstore. See the last section of this syllabus for a more detailed breakdown of specific reading assignments and the overall course calendar.

Evaluation Methods

The following are the assignments for this class and their relative weights in determining the final grade for the course.

1. Module Questions ñ This course will be divided up into seven modules (see below). Each student will be responsible for answering the discussion questions posted by the professor in the course modules and for responding to the answers of two other students to the same question. All responses should be posted in the discussion center (see Using First Class below). The professor will post the modules progressively, and he will post questions within each module progressively. This means that students should check the course module folders each time they sign on. Don't worry! The professor will repeat these instructions in each module. Please note that it is the quality and not the quantity of your responses that counts. In other words, the professor is not as concerned with how much you write as he is with what you write. As we get started, you should anticipate that this requirement will fulfill itself. If you are actively participating in the discussion center dialogue, you will not have to worry about this part of your evaluation. Responding to the module questions and to at least two of your fellow students' responses to each question will constitute 50% of your overall semester grade.

2. Research Paper ñ Each student will write a major paper in which the student compares and contrasts the work of one ancient and one modern theologian on a specific doctrine. The student will select the doctrine and the theologians from a list to be provided by the professor. For example, the student might compare Athanasius and Karl Barth on the doctrine of the Incarnation. The research paper is to be no less than ten and no more than twelve pages in length, and it will constitute 30% of the overall semester grade. The project will be due at the end of Module 6 (a more specific date will be announced later). Papers should be submitted to the D0501 Office (see Using First Class below).

3. Sermon/Church School Lesson - Each student will write either a sermon or prepare a Church School lesson that aims to educate parishioners on the theological importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. The student may wish to envision this project as something that she or he will actually use on Trinity Sunday (see the Church Calendar). The sermon or Church School lesson is to be no less than four and no more than eight pages in length. This assignment will contribute the remaining 20% of the final grade. Sermons/church school lessons should be submitted to the D0501 Office (see Using First Class below).

Course Calendar and Reading Assignments

The following general schedule will be followed during the semester. Specific dates for the beginning and ending of each module will be made available as we go.

Module 1 - Doctrinal Development in the Early Church (Reading: The Spirit of Early Christian Thought)
Module 2 - Christian Doctrine in the Modern World (Reading: The Domestication of Transcendence)
Module 3 - Recovering the Pastoral Function of Doctrine (Reading: Audio file from ATSí Library and By the Renewing of Your Minds)
Module 4 Contemporary Theological Reflection on Christian Doctrine (Reading: Essentials of Christian Theology)
Module 5: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Modern Theology (Reading: Rediscovering the Triune God)

As most of these modules last for more than one week, I will be issuing brief instructions weekly to be sure that we are progressing through the modules together. Please feel free to contact me at any time with questions on the referenced materials.

Using First Class

The Course Center will contain a copy of the syllabus as well as all class modules (No interaction takes place here. This is where the professor posts course materials only).

The Discussion Center will be used for all public, class communication. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the modules, the assignments, or anything else that would be of interest to your classmates and the professor, you should post to the Discussion Center.

The D0501 Office is for private correspondence between you and the professor. This will contain items that you do not want to appear publicly before all of your classmates, including assignments, papers, projects, and personal correspondence. This should not be used to ask general course-related questions.

The Archives Center will be used for storing conversations that have already taken place during the course of the semester. This keeps the Discussion Center from becoming too unmanageable.

The Chat Center is intended primarily for real-time interaction among students. You can get together with other members to study, ask questions, or to explore topics. Remember: None of the conversations carried on in this location are ever saved.

The Resource Center provides access to a number of specific tools available to all ExL students. These include access to the B.L. Fisher Library, chapel services in Estes Chapel, ExL Updates, Guidelines for Success, Helpful Hints, Interesting Links, a Powerpoint Viewer, and a Real Audio Player.

For Assistance with First Class and with Library Resources

For general questions regarding the ExL program, email
ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu

For technical support, email ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu

Obtaining Library Materials and Assistance

General Questions: [mailto:Ats_Reference@asburyseminary.edu
] information_commons@asburyseminary.edu Toll-free 1-866-454-2733
This is the best place to start when you have questions about library
resources. Help is available Monday-Thursday from 8AM-7PM and Friday
and Saturday from 8AM-5:45PM. If the people at the desk can not answer
your questions, they will direct you to the person or department who
can.

Materials Requests: [mailto:library_loan@asburyseminary.edu
] library_loan@asburyseminary.edu Or call toll-free 1-866-454-2733
ExL Students may request books, photocopies or emailed attachments of
journal articles/reference books from Asbury Seminary's Library.
Please allow 3-10 business days for all requests to be filled. Contact
the library loan office for information on costs and instructions on
how to make requests.
ExL students are also encouraged to make use of local library
resources. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the
Florida or the Wilmore campus should come to campus to obtain their
materials.

Research Questions: [mailto:Hannah_Kirsch@asburyseminary.edu
] Hannah_Kirsch@asburyseminary.edu Or call the toll-free number and ask
to be transferred to Hannah (x2189).
ExL students are encouraged to contact Hannah Kirsch for research
assistance including help choosing a paper topic, determining the best
sources to use for a paper, finding book reviews, or research questions
about using the online databases or any other library materials.

Online Databases:

To access the online library resources including the library
catalog and full-text journal databases, go to
[<http://www.asburyseminary.edu/library>] www.asburyseminary.edu/library
and enter your 10 digit student id number
in the login box. Your student id is provided on the
biographical information section of the
student registration webpage. Add a 2 and enough 0's to the
front to make a ten digit
number (20000XXXXX where XXXXX = your student id). If you have
questions, contact
the information commons desk.