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DO 501 Basic Christian Doctrine

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Basic Christian Doctrine

DO 501

Dr. Ron Creasman, Professor

Extended Learning On Line Course

Fall 2003

(Notice: This is an **unofficial** copy)

Welcome! This course, DO 501, is Asbury's introductory class to basic Christian doctrine and I look forward to working with each of you as we explore the fundamental beliefs of our Christian faith. I hope that you will gain a thoughtful understanding of what we believe as well as an appreciation of the importance of correct doctrine for your personal life and your ministry. Many of you may be wondering what difference theology makes in the practice of ministry. I assure you, theology is of critical significance to the manner in which we carry out our vocation, whatever our particular calling may be.

Take for instance the topic of divine providence. This doctrine has profound implications for the way we minister to those whose lives have been touched by tragedy. In many other ways, what we believe about God, humans, and creation determines the form and content of our ministry. Moreover, it is unfortunately true that false ideas gradually influence our thinking, to the point where we find ourselves thinking and behaving in ways that do not accurately reflect the truths of Christianity. This pertains to areas as diverse as the way we worship to the way we recreate.

Although this class is about doctrine, it is not about doctrinal hairsplitting. Rather, the majority of our attention will focus on the grand truths of our Christian tradition. These truths are those contained in the classical creeds that have been preserved through the centuries. But don't be misled into thinking that because these doctrines are basic, they are simplistic. You will be asked to do some very hard thinking about the mysteries of our faith. At times you may find yourself challenged and even perplexed.

What else could be expected from trying to understand, for example, the mystery of a Savior who is at the same time fully God and completely human? Or what about trying to grapple with the nature of original sin? While a complete understanding of such doctrines is beyond us, it is certainly worthwhile to wrestle with the complexities of the issues, for they are essential to what we believe, and in fact strongly influence the way we minister. I hope you will be open to new ways of thinking as we embark on this journey together. Be open and honest about how you are doing. Your classmates and I are here to help.

Let's each of us prepare to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us into a deeper understanding of who God is so that we might more fully experience God's love for us personally and so that we might be better ministers of that love to others.

PURPOSE / DESCRIPTION

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.

OBJECTIVES: By the end of the course students will:

1. Have developed a working theological vocabulary that will support further study in theology and related disciplines.
2. Have grasped the vital connection between theology, the Christian life, and the practice of ministry.
3. Have been introduced to all the major areas in the study of Christian theology.
4. Be able to articulate the distinctive doctrinal emphases of Asbury Theological Seminary
5. Be able to reflect theologically upon the practice of ministry.
6. Have developed a love for God's truth and cultivated a sense of appreciation for God's personal self-introduction in the biblical history of salvation.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. General Class Participation (35%) Obviously this cannot be a lecture centered class, therefore the format of the course will center around online discussions of the assigned weekly readings. Each student will be expected to post responses to discussion prompts and to respond to at least two responses of others. These responses are to be thoughtful yet concise (e.g. 50-100 words per posting)

2. Doctrine in Ministry Scenarios (20%) Approximately every other week, a written assignment will be given requiring the student to apply the readings to a real life ministry situation. These papers will be brief, typically 2 pages double spaced. For specific assignments see the schedule below.

3. Sermon or Church School Lesson on Doctrine (20%). Each student will write either a sermon or prepare a Church School lesson which aims to educate parishioners on the importance of doctrine in general and of the truthfulness of one particular doctrine. I will oversee the selection of which doctrine, you will decide upon sermon or Church School lesson based upon your ministry plans. This sermon or Church School lesson is to be not less than four nor more than eight pages in length.

4. Annotation of one of the Creeds (25%) Each student will provide an annotation of one of five Creeds, to be assigned during the course. The purpose of the annotation is to clarify and explain the different truth claims made by the Creed. In addition to the annotation, a defense of the truth claims made by the Creed should be provided. The purpose of the defense is to answer one question for the non-believer: what warrants belief in these doctrinal claims? This exercise is to be not less than eight nor more than twelve pages in length, double spaced.

SCHEDULE / OUTLINE

Week 1 (Sept. 2) Opening introductions. Sources and nature of doctrine. Two definitions of faith. Read Gonzalez/Perez 9-31 and Lawson 1-10. . Bettenson 'Xianity and Ancient Learning' , Justin (and Clement) vs Tertullian, pg 5-6. Anselms proof of God's existence (Bettenson 137)

Week 2 (Sept. 9) The Doctrine of Revelation. Natural vs. Special revelation. The Word of God. Various theories of biblical inspiration. Read Gonzalez/Perez 33-43 and Lawson, 23-25. 18th Cent Deism, Bettenson 312.

Week 3 (Sept. 16) The Doctrine of God. God's nature and attributes. Arguments for God's existence. The triune God. Trans-sexuality of God. Read Gonzalez/Perez 43-52 and Lawson 10-23, 119-125. Selected biblical passages: Luke 1:26-37; Mark 1:9-11; John 14:8-11, 15-20, 25; Romans 1:1-4.

Week 4 (Sept. 23) The doctrine of creation. Divine providence: God's activity in creation. Miracles and Angles. Read Gonzalez/Perez 55-64; 73-76 and Lawson 25-33. *First Doctrine in Ministry Scenario assignment due by the end of this week.*

Week 5 (Sept. 30) The doctrine of Christ: His person. Incarnation. Virgin Birth. Truly God and Truly Man. Christological debates and heresies. Read Gonzalez/Perez 77-83 and Lawson 41-65 and . Bettenson Irenaeus, 24-30, Tertullian 31, Athanasius 31, Various Heresies, Docetism 35-41, Gnosticism, Monarchianims, Sabellianism, Arianism, Apollinarianism 44, Nestorianism 46, Tome of Leo 49, Definistion of Chalcedon 51, Aquinas on Incarnation contingent on the Fall, 141-45.

Week 6 (Oct. 7) The doctrine of Christ: His work. The Cross. Theories of Atonement. The nature of salvation. Read Gonzalez/Perez 83-97 and Lawson 65-66; 79-96. Bettenson, 138. *Second Doctrine in Ministry Scenario assignment due by the end of this week.*

Week 7 (Oct. 14)The doctrine of Evil. Sinful human nature. The origin of sin. The devil. Theodicy. Read Gonzalez/Perez 64-73 and Lawson 66-79. , Bettenson, Pelagianism 52, Augustianism 54-58, Luther 211, Calvin 212, Council of Trent on O. Sin, 262, Arminianism 268. *Third Doctrine in Ministry Scenario assignment due by the end of this week.*

Week 8 (Oct. 21) The doctrine of Christ's Resurrection. The meaning of Christ's Resurrection. Evidences for the Resurrection. The perpetual humanity of Christ. Read Lawson 96-108. *Fourth Doctrine in Ministry Scenario assignment due by the end of this week.*

Week 9 (Oct. 28) The doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.. The Spirit's role in salvation. Pentecost and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Read Lawson 111-119. *Fifth Doctrine in Ministry Scenario assignment due by the end of this week.*

Week 10 (Nov. 4) The doctrine of the Church. Earthly and spiritual versions. Community of Believers. Body of Christ. Agency of Christ's work in this world. Read Gonzalez/Perez 97-119 and Lawson 126-143.

Week 11 (Nov. 11) The doctrine of worship. Sacraments. Baptism. Eucharist. Read Gonzalez/Perez 119-139 and Lawson 155-183. Bettenson, 62... Eucharist 74, Aquinas on Eucharist 147-151, Luther's catechism 208.

Week 12 (Nov. 18) The doctrine of afterlife. The return of Christ. The significance of death. Judgment. Hell. The general resurrection. The new heaven and the new earth. Read Gonzalez/Perez 139-159 and Lawson 236-270. *Writing assignment: Sermon or Church School Lesson on Doctrine, due by the end of this week.*

Fall Reading Week (Nov. 25)

Week 13 (Dec. 2) Various concluding topics. Asbury Wesleyan distinctives. Assurance of faith. Sanctification. Christian Doctrine in the context of Postmodernism. Luther's Catechism on the Creed, Bettenson 205 Selected readings

Week 14 (Dec. 8) Finals Week

Writing assignment: Annotation of a Creed, due this week

DOCTRINE IN MINISTRY SCENARIOS (Writing Assignments)

WEEK 4

In the light of what you have learned, write a prayer of adoration (one which centers upon who God is) which focuses upon God's omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, but most of all on God's love. Be sure to include God's immanence and transcendence. Assume that you will be using the prayer in a worship service where you have been asked to pray. DON'T move to other elements of prayer such as confession or petition, STAY with adoration. (1 page double-spaced).

WEEK 6

In the light of what you have learned, write a meditation for the December edition of a church newsletter. The meditation should be entitled, "Why All this Fuss About Christmas?" and should be based upon John 1:14--"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us". (2 pages, double-spaced)

WEEK 7

You are talking to a non-Christian friend of yours to whom you have been trying to witness about the Christian faith. She/he says to you, "I can't understand why you Christians make such a big deal about the cross. It bothers me that your religion centers around someone's gruesome, bloody, violent death. I don't understand why that had to happen. And I know I'm not perfect, but have I done something so

bad that someone had to be tortured to death for me? That's what you Christians say, but it doesn't make sense." In seeking to convey the significance of the cross, how would you respond to your friend? (2 pages, double-spaced).

WEEK 8

You are visiting with Mary and John Smith, an unchurched couple in your community whom you have gotten to know quite well. A year ago, their teenage son, Mark, was seriously injured in a football game. As a result he is paralyzed from the waist down and confined to a wheel chair. Because John's parents were active members in your church, you got to know them after the accident. In fact, you visited with them many times during the first few months after the accident and have helped them work through their emotional pain.

Now things have settled down and they seem to be making the best of the situation. But during the course of this particular visit they begin to voice their questions about God. John expresses it like this: "I just don't understand it. How could a god who is loving and all-powerful, let something like this happen? Why didn't God intervene? It makes me wonder if God really cares the way you say He does and if he really is in charge after all. I want to believe, but I just can't make sense of it." Write down what you would say to John and Mary. (It might be helpful to use some biblical passages. Make your response 2 pages double-spaced).

WEEK 9

Celia, a college age woman at your church has fallen in love with a devout Hindu named Ravi. He has come to church with her a few times and is a warm, funloving person whom everyone immediately likes. Ravi sees no conflict in their faiths, and considers the Gospel to be an admirable alternate version of the same life of virtue he seeks to live. Celia painfully decided to end the relationship a few weeks ago and is recovering fairly well. What troubles her at this time is why God would send Ravi to hell for his beliefs. In many ways, Ravi was the most caring, giving, and non-judgmental person she had ever known. She has asked you to lunch for the purpose of explaining why Ravi will be damned for eternity. Write your response. (2 pages, double-spaced)

REQUIRED TEXTS

Justo L. Gonzalez and Zaida Maldonado Perez, An Introduction to Christian Theology

John Lawson, Introduction to Christian Doctrine

Henry Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church. 2nd Edition.

FirstClass Icon Procedures

Let me summarize how I intend us to use the icons in the DO501 folder.

The Course Center will contain a copy of the syllabus as well as all class modules.

The Discussion Center will be used for all public communications. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the modules, the assignments, or anything else

which would be of interest to your classmates and the professor, you should post to the Discussion Center.

The DO 501 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.

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.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Justo L. Gonzalez and Zaida Maldonado Perez, *An Introduction to Christian Theology*
John Lawson, *Introduction to Christian Doctrine*
Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

For **general questions regarding the ExL program**, contact Kevin Osborn at ExL_Director@asburyseminary.edu or Extended_Learning@asburyseminary.edu.

For **technical support**, contact Jared Porter at ExL_Support@asburyseminary.edu.

For **library reference support**, contact Hannah Kirsch at Hannah_Kirsch@asburyseminary.edu.

For **interlibrary loans**, contact Dot James at Dot_James@asburyseminary.edu.

Obtaining Library Materials and Reference Assistance
Email: Ats_Reference@asburyseminary.edu

Toll-Free Reference Help Line: 1-866-454-2733

ExL students are encouraged to make use of local libraries, if possible. However, library services are always available to students through Asbury's B. L. Fisher Library. All requests for books and journal articles should be e-mailed to the Reference Desk (ATS_Reference@asburyseminary.edu). The Reference workers (Hannah, Robbie, and Nina) will also assist ExL students with reference requests, using various online databases, or doing research on a specific topic.

To request material from the B.L. Fisher Library, begin by searching the library catalog (for books available in the library) or one of the restricted journal databases available on the library's website (www.asburyseminary.edu/library - choose "library catalog" or "restricted databases"). Then send an email to the reference desk citing the sources that you would like to request. If you need help searching the databases, do not hesitate to call (1-866-454-2733) or email the reference desk. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Wilmore campus should come to campus to obtain their materials.

Please allow 5-10 business days for all requests to be filled. ExL students are billed for the cost of photocopies (5 cents per page); however, shipping via media rate is free. (Media rate normally takes 5 business days for shipping, but it can take two weeks to addresses in the West). Express mail services (prices vary according to weight) and scanning (10 cents per page in pdf format) are also available. Requests generally require 1-2 business days to be processed. Plan ahead and make your requests early enough to allow for shipping and processing!

