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DO 690 John Wesley's Theology for Today

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Course: DO690 X1 (SP 2009)
Title: John Wesley's Theology for Today
Hours: 3.00
Published: Yes, on 02/02/2009
Prerequisites:
None

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Meetings:
During 02/09/2009 to 05/22/2009 Online via ExL.

Maximum Registration: 27
Catalog Description: This course focuses upon the distinct theological contributions of John Wesley to the larger Christian tradition. It integrates theology and the practice of ministry by showing the impact of Wesley's theology on his ministry and indicating the relevance of the Wesleyan model for the contemporary church. ST501 is a recommended preparatory course.

Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, the student will have an understanding of:
1. Wesley's theology within the spectrum of catholic Christianity;
2. The distinctive beliefs of Wesley's doctrinal thinking;
3. Wesley's emphasis on the significance of doctrine for the Christian life;
4. Wesley's methodical use of the Bible, reason, experience, and tradition as norms for doctrinal formulation;
5. Wesley's concept of Christian perfection as the focus of faith and practice;
6. The role of John Fletcher as Wesley's designated successor and interpreter.
7. The relevant aspects of Wesley's thinking for today.

Required Texts:

Texts and Readings Assignments
1. The required sermons of John Wesley for this class are listed in the assignment for each module. Students may use the Thomas Jackson edition, which can be downloaded from the Internet. Here is the primary website for these sermons:
   http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/Wesley/jwesley3.html (numeric index)
   http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons (title index)
   Each module will have the website address for each sermon so that the student will only need to click on the address in order to be taken to it on the Internet.

Scholars in their professional work cite The Works of John Wesley; begun as "The Oxford Edition of The Works of John Wesley" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-1983); continued as "The Bicentennial Edition of The Works of John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984--); 14 of 35 vols, published to date. This is the recent critical edition of Wesley's writings. These are not available online, but are now available on CD from
Abingdon Press. However, students will be allowed to use the Jackson's edition of Wesley's works, The Works of John Wesley, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872; reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978) since it is only available on the Internet.

Students who would like to have a hard copy in their hands when they read the assigned sermons may wish to purchase Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991). This anthology is available as a fairly cheap price at Amazon.com. Another choice is N. Burwash, Wesley's Fifty Two Standard Sermons (1881, reprinted by Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishing Co., 1967), which is available in the seminary bookstore.

2. A. Skevington Wood, The Burning Heart (Cliff College Publishers, 2004). This is a classic work on John Wesley. Christianity Today says this book is one of the "top 5 books on Church History" (December 2007 issue). It provides a discussion of his background, his mission, and his message, thus offering a taxonomy of his life and theology in a single work by an internationally respected Wesley scholar. Wood (1917-1993) was a British Methodist minister, preacher and scholar. For seven years he was Principal of Cliff College in Derbyshire, and he was elected the first President of the Wesley Fellowship (a professional scholarly society) in the United Kingdom in 1984. He was also a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in the United Kingdom. (Skevington Wood is not related to the professor of this class!). The strength of this book is its biographical details and extensive quotations from Wesley's own writings. Some will consider a weakness of the book to be its idealizing respect for John Wesley, known as hagiography. Skevington Wood was a man with a passion for evangelism, and hence his interpretation of Wesley (rightly noting that Wesley was primarily an evangelist himself) reflects this point of view. Although its tendency toward hagiography may be a weakness from a scholarly standpoint, it nonetheless catches the significance of Wesley's life and ministry as an evangelist and is the most reliable single volume on his life and thought. His high respect and passion for Wesley does not detract from his careful scholarship.

3. L. Wood, The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism, Rediscovering John Fletcher As Wesley’s Vindicator and Designated Successor (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002). [Winner of the Smith-Wynkoop 2003 Book of the Year Award presented by the Wesleyan Theological Society]. Understanding the "whole Wesley" also entails understanding John Fletcher whom Wesley authorized to be his interpreter and defender. He is the only "Wesley scholar" to have enjoyed Wesley's imprimatur. Thomas Jackson said: "Next to Mr. Wesley, he was the ablest advocate of the Methodist tenets." J. F. Hurst (the most significant Wesley scholar in the second half of the 19th century) said that Fletcher's writings "constitute the greatest prose contribution to the literature of the Methodist awakening as do Charles Wesley’s hymns to its poetry." Because of Wesley's approval, Fletcher's writings became the filter through which Wesley's sermons were read and interpreted by the early Methodists. Today it is impossible to understand the emergence of schools like Asbury and even the Pentecostal movement without understanding the significance of John Fletcher. And it is impossible to fully understand the early Methodist movement without reference to the writings of John Fletcher who is "the theologian of Methodism" as Claude Thompson of Candler School of Theology put it in 1960 and recently repeated by Thomas Langford, the late professor of Duke University. Not only did Fletcher serve as Wesley's interpreter, but Wesley was also influenced in his later sermons by Fletcher. One of the great omissions among recent Wesley scholars is their failure to see the larger picture of Wesley’s theology because they ignore the intimate relationship between Wesley and Fletcher. If Wesley considered Fletcher to be a co-leader of the Methodists, then a course in the theology of John Wesley cannot ignore him. And if Trinitarian pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit) is influential today in part because of Fletcher's writings on this subject in the late 18th century, then rediscovering John Fletcher is essential for understanding the relevance of "John Wesley’s Theology Today," which is the name of this course.

Course Requirements:

1. A grade of "C" will include the following:

- Read the assigned sermons of Wesley.
- Participate faithfully each week in the interactive sessions. This is the main component of the course.
- Read A. Skevington Wood, The Burning Heart.
- Read The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism, Rediscovering John Fletcher as Wesley’s Vindicator and Designated Successor, Preface xii-xx, 1-198
- Type a 2-3 page essay (double spaced) on "Justice and Mercy in the Life and Thought of John Wesley." A highly recommended primary resource for this paper is Leon Hynson, The Wesleyan revival: John Wesley's ethics for church and nation. [Radical righteousness: studies in evangelical and Wesleyan theology, ethics, and history] (Schmul Publishers, 1999). This is an expanded version of Hynson's classic book entitled, To Reform the Nation (1994). It is available in the bookstore.

Those receiving 3 hours credit are required to:

- Read carefully the remaining chapters of The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism (Chapters 10-16).
- Mark up your pages of The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism according to the general guidelines of Mortimer Adler, who was one of the leading university educators in America and was the late professor of philosophy from the Univ. of Chicago (he died in 2001 at the age of 98!). He has shown that marking up your pages makes its contents a part of your intellectual makeup and is an invaluable learning tool. See his guidelines: http://radicalacademy.com/adlermarkabook.htm.
- Students will report to the professor that they have marked up the book according to Adler’s guidelines and will send a photocopy of two pages from the book as a sample of the quality of your marking to: Larry Wood, Asbury Theological Seminary, 204 N. Lexington Avenue, Wilmore, KY 40390. Do not send via email.
- Instead of marking up your book, the student may choose to take notes (one typed page for each 20 pages read). Two pages from these notes as a sample of your work should be mailed to the professor via USPS at: Larry Wood, Asbury Seminary, 204 N. Lexington Avenue, Wilmore, KY 40390. Do not send via email.
- N.B. If you choose to mark up your books instead of taking notes, you must use a clean copy. You are not permitted to use a book that is already marked. If you have a book that is marked up, you must choose the note-taking option.

2. A grade of "A" or "B": In order to receive an "A" or "B" for the course, students must do all of the above for a grade of "C," PLUS students must take an exam over the required readings. The test questions will be based on the same questions that are found in the weekly assignments.